

Shipwreck and Destination

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[0:00] I had a lot of excitement coming into the finale because I quite like finales. Christina and I don't get a chance to watch too much in terms of TV these days, but I was just reminiscing on the finales that I've liked over the years.

Of course, growing up, I've told you before, I grew up in the late 1900s, so Friends was kind of my staple. It has not aged well, I'll say that, but a great show.

Of course, the finale, did she get on the plane or did she not get on the plane? That was a big thing. But there are, of course, other shows that I was deeply influenced by. TVB was part of my early childhood diet as well.

A show called Shutsanfeiwu. Has anyone heard of it, watched it? Whoa, okay, aging, okay. Li Fong. Zhanqing. I've watched Zhanqing. Who watched Zhanqing? How many episodes of Zhanqing were there?

A thousand? That was a thing? Oh, wow, that's a big one. Of course, if you grew up in the era that I did and you watched these Chinese TV shows, then you basically fluctuated your career plans from being a policeman to being a doctor to being a fireman and then to being a martial arts expert.

[1:07] And so that was what I grew up with. And I always approached that finale with a lot of excitement. Because it's like, whoa, this is how it finishes. And then I read Acts chapters 27 and 28, which is what we're going to be going through.

And I'll be honest, there was some drama. But it wasn't finishing how I expected it to finish. And so as we're going to go through this passage here, what we're actually going to see is the end of the account of Paul.

And we've been with Paul for a long time. Actually, trivia. When was Paul first introduced? Which chapter in the book of Acts? Does anyone know?

Scanning. Any brave souls? Huh? Nine? Did you just say nine? That's when he kind of got blinded. So you're right.

But there was a mention of his name in chapter 8. At the end of chapter 7. Where you've got Stephen, the deacon, who gets killed.

[2:10] And then they say, and then this man called Saul is overseeing this execution. Fast forward to Acts chapter 28. We've been with Paul for nearly 30 years.

That's why I was mildly sentimental as I was approaching this. So I was like, when, we've been with him for a long time. We've gone through chapter after chapter, city after city, prison after prison. And we're finally reaching the end of his life. And what is his finale? What is his daiki go? He goes to meet Caesar. And so I'm like, oh, this is going to be fun. This is going to be good to see how it all ends.

And the ending isn't quite what I expected. But yet still there's so much to learn. There is also still so much drama. So what I'm going to do is actually, instead of reading Acts chapter 27 and 28 and getting us to stand for all of that, I'm actually, I've chosen a different passage that we're going to read.

And it's actually one of his final words in 2 Timothy. And so can I invite you to stand as is our custom to read the word of the Lord. We stand because we remind ourselves of the reverence and awe that we have for the word of God.

[3:13] But it's not what James is saying that's going to be important. It's actually going to be the word of God that changes our lives. So I want to invite JP up to read for us 2 Timothy chapter 4 verse 1 to 8.

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead. And by his appearing and his kingdom, preach the word, be ready in season and out of season,

reprove, rebuke, and exhort with a complete patience and teaching.

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itchy ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.

And they will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into the myths. As for you, always be sober minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.

[4 : 20] Henceforth, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on the day. And not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing.

This is the word of the Lord. Please take a seat. Those words are precious. And even as JP was reading them, I was imagining if this was a movie, I can see just orchestra music in the background as he's saying, I have fought the good fight.

I have ran my race. I've come to the end. My 30 years are being poured out as a sacrifice for the kingdom of God. And yet, we're going to go back now.

I'll give you some time, as I find it, to the end of Acts. Acts chapter 27 and 28. It doesn't end how I expected it to end, because I thought it was going to be about Paul finally meeting Caesar, maybe converting Caesar, and then boom, Christianity explodes and springboards from there.

But it doesn't quite end how I expected it to. But yet, the story is dramatic. And all we're going to do today is actually going to follow the story. And through following the story, we'll see something that's very interesting.

[5 : 30] And that is this. And I want you to anchor on this. The story isn't about Paul. The story is also not about me or you. The story is about God.

It's about the sovereignty of God. It's about how God is completely in control from the beginning to the very end. And you see this coming out. Because I'm very conscious when we look at this book, sometimes we look at this book and we go, okay, where can I find myself in this book?

What's the challenge that I'm facing? Oh, there's a shipwreck happening. Well, maybe it's going to talk to me about my shipwreck. Maybe it's talking to me about my challenges that I have. And whilst there are ways that we can apply it in that way, but that actually can also be a dangerous thing.

What we're trying to do here is not to find ourselves in the story, but to find God in the story. And so as we look at this story as an account, and if anyone who is actually afraid of the ocean and afraid of getting on a boat, this won't help that much.

But what we see is actually God's fingerprints, God actually being in complete control all the way.

So we're simply just going to go through it. And you can track me and I'll be tracking the time as well to hopefully we can finish the two chapters by then.

[6 : 34] And so it says this, chapter seven. And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan cohort named Julius.

So again, it's not about us. This is actually a real live event. Who wrote the book of Acts? Luke. He explains why he writes to Theophilus, right?

He's saying, I'm here to keep an account of what happened. So actually you'll be able to see and generations in the future will be able to see what happened. So all Luke is doing here is actually he's keeping an account and a very detailed account of what happens towards the end of their journey here.

And what's really interesting is, and it was decided that we should sail for Italy. Remember for the longest time from Acts chapter nine, so 15 and 16, it was always Paul doing this, Paul doing that.

And suddenly Luke joins a party and says, we're going. So this is just, for me, it's just encouragement that when Paul is going on his journey, he starts off alone, but very quickly people join him and people who are willing to join him.

[7 : 32] Where's he going? He's going to Jerusalem. He's going to Rome. He's going to prison. He's going to death. Yet there are friends who are going with him. Isn't that just a comfort?

Isn't that encouraging that we don't do this by ourselves? And so he says, we are going. Because remember, Luke does not need to get on this boat. Because where's Paul going? He's going to prison. He's going to go meet Caesar.

This isn't going to end well. And yet Luke says, I don't care. I'm coming with you. I'm coming with you so I can keep an account of what's happening and I can be your friend and I can support you. I

think that is amazing. And when they go, it's not just Paul.

There's some other prisoners as well. And they're looked after by a centurion. There's only two centurions that we've heard about in the book of Acts. And one is in Acts chapter 10, right? And Cornelius. And then now we have another one called Juju.

Okay. Juju is here. He's a centurion. So we have our own Juju. But this one would have been much taller because there would have been a height requirement. So to be a centurion. So I actually searched for that.

[8:29] It's actually six foot tall. Anyway, I digress. So this actually happened. This actually happened and it happened in 59 AD. And it happened in October, November time.

It happened in the fall. So this is an actual account of what happened to Paul as he was going to Rome. Now, he thought he was going to Rome to meet Caesar. But he didn't know how.

He didn't know that it was going to be as a prisoner in a boat that ends up getting shipwrecked. And embarking in a ship, they go. And they go along a few coasts. And they're accompanied not just by Luke, but by Aristarchus.

So there's three of them. So there's Paul, there's Luke, and there's Aristarchus. Where have we heard from Aristarchus? We've heard of him once in Acts chapter 19 in Ephesus when there was a riot. Remember there was a guy called Demetrius who was losing a lot of money because he made statues of the goddess Artemis.

But he was getting annoyed because Paul was telling people Artemis isn't real. And how dare he? So that means his business, his stockpile, his warehouse of statues, he can't sell now. So he starts a riot and he drags Aristarchus out into the court.

[9:33] Okay, so that's where we see Aristarchus. Again, Aristarchus doesn't need to be on this boat. But he's saying, Paul, where you go, I will go with you. I'm your bro, ride or die. So they go. So the next day we put in at Sidon and Juju, Julius, treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for.

Recap, again, reminder. Paul was a prisoner. But yet the guy in charge says, hey, you're a prisoner, but I quite like you. We're going to stop here. And you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to trust you.

I'm going to let you go and find your friends. And so he actually lets him go. And then Paul gets cared for. Isn't that amazing that a prisoner would have that kind of treatment? You see the favor of God on Paul again here.

So he puts an Apple Air tag on him and then he lets him go and tracks him. But then lets Paul basically do whatever he wants. And then he comes back. I think that's fascinating in itself. And putting out, oh, the other thing that's fascinating, Paul has friends in every city.

We talked about this last time. You thought he was a lone ranger. You thought he is doing this on his own. He's fighting this good fight, running this race on his own. But every city he goes to, he finds friends. Isn't that amazing? That he's supported.

[10:38] That there are people who are ready to go meet him to risk their lives and to actually spend time supporting him. And so they go. And putting out to the sea from there, we sailed under the lee of Cyprus.

And they basically start going around the Mediterranean to head to Rome. That's the goal here. Did I ever tell you that Christina and I got married on a Mediterranean cruise ship? It was the cheapest way to get married.

Because everyone pays for themselves. So it was really fun. It was really good. But then actually, at that time of year, the Mediterranean is actually not a great time. Because the weather starts to turn. That's why we know it was October, November.

And because there's a reason why. So they keep sailing. And then they find another boat. This is verse 6. They're the centurion. Found a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy. So they actually had to change boats. So they had to go from the blue line to the red line.

And they had to change ships. And then they move on. And they keep going. And the word you see in ESV, it says, we sailed under the lee of Crete of Salmone. The word lee simply means the side of an island. The side of an island would have been the safest place.

[11:38] Because it would have been away from the biggest winds. So they would have been able to control where they were going. Coasting along it, but yet still with great difficulty, we came to a place called Fairhavens.

Near which was the city of La Sille. Interesting. They're going on this. They're going basically just curling around the island. Trying to get to Rome now. But then it's getting very hard.

Since much time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous because even the fast was already over. That's why we know it was in the fall. Paul advised them. So Paul says, the prisoner, Paul says, the one who actually has no control and no power and no influence on the boat says, Guys, I actually don't think it's a good idea.

I think we should wait here. What does he say? Says, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives. Paul knows.

In 2 Corinthians, we see Paul actually says, hey, I've been beaten. I've been thrown into prison. I've actually had three shipwrecks already. And that was before this one. So he's already had three shipwrecks.

[12:38] So he's an expert in this. He's like, guys, I don't think it's a good idea that we go. Because if we go, we're going to lose our cargo. And we're actually going to lose lives. We should just hang out and stay here over winter. And we'll go afterwards.

What happens then? They look at him and go, well, you're the prisoner. And we have professional sailors on the boat who know what they're doing. Plus, we don't want to stay in this place through winter. So we're going to keep going. Verse 11.

But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said. And because the harbor was not suitable to spend the winter, the majority decided to put out to sea from there on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, not the one in the U.S., a harbor of Crete facing both southwest and northwest and spend the winter there.

So instead of relying or trusting in this prophet who actually could hear and actually know what God was trying to tell them, they would trust in worldly wisdom. They would trust in the professionals, which in some ways you can't really blame them because they were the ones put in charge here. But anyway, they ignore him. Of course, he's also a prisoner. So they go. Verse 13. Now, when the south wind blew gently, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they were like, see, it's okay. We're fine. We did the right thing, guys.

[13:45] We're heading to the right direction. Suddenly, it turns. They anchored and sailed along Crete, close to the shore. But verse 14. But soon, a tempestuous wind called the northeaster struck down from the land.

So a T-10 comes into town. So Typhoon 10 comes, and now they can't control. What they thought was going okay, when they thought they had made the right decision, now they realize we probably should listen to that prisoner.

So they completely lose control, and the ship gets caught, and basically they give up, and they just have to follow wherever the wind takes them. So they reach a small island called Korda. We manage with difficulty to secure the ship's boat.

So it wasn't going well. So the first thing they do was, hey, that lifeboat is just hanging off our boat. Let's secure it. Let's bring it back in. Let's make sure that we have this as our backup. So they bring it back in. But then it carries on.

After hoisting it up, they used supports to undergo the ship. Then fearing they would run aground on the situs, they lowered the gear, and thus they were driven along. Since they were violently storm-tossed, they began next day to jettison the cargo.

[14:44] So day one, they're like, let's bring the lifeboat back in, just in case. Day two, it's not looking good. Let's throw all the cargo off. Let's throw all the goods that we were supposed to ship off.

Let's not worry about the consequences. Let's just survive this. So they throw it off. Day three, they're like, oh, it's not going well. Let's throw all the tackle off. The tackle is basically the equipment that was used to steer the ship.

Let's get rid of those things too. It doesn't look good, guys. Yes, we best clear out this boat so we can have our highest chance of survival here. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.

Actually, does anyone get motion sickness here? Big thing. It's really bad. I have it really bad too. When we were still living in England, we'd visit, of course, the Mediterranean.

We'd go to all these places. I remember one time we went to the Algarve and we went to go out to see dolphins. Well, that's what the hope was. My family saw the dolphins. I was sat inside the cabin just wanting to throw up my intestines.

[15:48] Though I did find out. The guy, he gave me this trick. He said, use a water bottle and put it on the back of your neck. Has anyone heard of that? It worked. I miss the dolphins. But it worked.

Anyway. All hope was lost. Why? Because by now, it's probably a week in. With no food. With no hope of steering wherever they needed to go.

And so they were just stranded, floating in the ocean. Can you imagine professionals who have grown up on the sea deciding, hey, we have no chance now. Any chance of survival is gone.

And since they had been without food for a long time, verse 21, Paul stands up. And then he says, guys, I told you so. Men, you should have listened to me.

And not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. Can you just imagine? The storm is still going. They haven't seen the sun or the stars.

[16:47] So the storms are just so wild. It's just dark the whole time. And they can't even sit in a place still. And yet Paul stands up and says, hey, guys, one, I told you so.

But it's okay. Stay calm. Because just this evening, an angel of the Lord stood with me and said these words to me. Verse 24.

Oh, actually, verse 23 first. For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship. Isn't that just beautiful?

This guy is in the eye of the storm. Everyone else has lost all hope. Completely abandoned any hope of being saved. He says, I had God stand next to me.

And this God I belong to and I worship. I have a personal relationship with this God. And that's why I have this peace. Wouldn't it be great if we as Christians, whenever we are in storm, that we can stand and go, hey, that we're in a storm right now.

[17:51] But yet I just feel complete peace. Why? Because there is a God whom I belong to, who I worship, who I completely trust. And he says, do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand before Caesar.

And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you. So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. But we must run aground on some island.

He says, this very night, while you guys were throwing off all the things on the boat to try and survive, or you're just lying there now because you've given up, God stood in our midst and told me, I still have a mission.

I must meet Caesar. And because of that, you guys are all going to be saved as well. Isn't that pretty cool? Verse 27. When the 14th night had come, they'd been on this ship floating for two weeks.

No food. They were driven across the Adriatic Sea. About midnight, the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. So as they were getting close to some land, the sailors, the professionals, who thought they knew they were doing, started to hear.

[18:58] What it was, was they started to hear that the waves were crashing differently. Well, before there were no waves. It would just be the ocean. But they started to hear a different sound, which was, oh, it sounds like the water is crashing against some land.

So they heard it, and so they used their expertise, and they said, well, let's check it out. So they lowered the anchor, and what they would do is lower the anchor, and then they would see how far the actual ocean bed was. And they did it once. So they took a sounding and found 20 fathoms. And a little farther on, they took a sounding again and found 15 fathoms. That means they were getting closer and closer to land. And just when you thought that would be enough, and fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come. They were like, guys, I think we're getting closer. Maybe there is some hope. And so they start praying. Because before, they couldn't even pray. They were like, that's it, we're done. But now they start praying.

But I wonder who they're praying to. I think they're praying to all kinds of gods. Any god that will help them, they're praying for gods. Like, can you, can you, please save us. God of fertility, God of, God of business, God of work, everyone.

[20:01] God, please, who has a god? Bring out the Pokemon cards. Let's pray to each of those Pokemon. Let's see if that will help too. So they're praying to everyone. And this tells me something else. That actually, again, it was the podcast that I listened to that Chris recommended last week.

And actually, it quoted a C.S. Lewis quote, which is, there are no atheists in the trenches. There are no atheists in the trenches. You can say that you don't believe in God. You can say that you're

okay, that you've made your own way, that you work very hard to get to where you are. But actually, the moment life goes out of control, the moment there is suffering, the moment there is sickness, there are no atheists then. Because we all know, deep down inside us, there's something that we must appeal to that is out of our control.

Someone out there is bigger and has more power than us. There are no atheists in the trenches. So these sailors, who ignored this prophet, then decide just to pray to whoever. But only Paul was praying to the God who could actually save them.

But these sailors did something interesting. They did something very cheeky. They said, we're getting close to land. Let's try and get there. But when I say, let us try and get there, they just meant themselves.

[21:05] There were 276 people on this boat. But the sailors, verse 30, as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship and had lowered the ship's boat into the sea under the pretense of laying out anchors from the boat.

So the sailors would tell everyone else, guys, I think we're getting close to land. I think we need to anchor and find our way to get onto that land. So they would tell people that's what they were doing. But what they were actually doing was lowering the lifeboats so that they could sneak off themselves.

And then Paul, I don't know whether he just observes and sees or whether God told him. He says, verse 31, Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.

Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it go. So just when they thought they could escape, Paul snitches on them and says, well, you can't let them off this boat.

And actually, as we were talking about this passage as a team this last week, it was Gabriel who brought this up. Isn't it interesting? Because if you just rewind a little bit to what Paul said God told him, or the angel of the Lord told him, which is that all these men will be saved.

[22:12] God has granted you all those who sail with you. And so no one will actually die. And yet just a few verses later, Paul says, hey, you will only be saved if you listen to me.

If you will, you will only be saved if you trust me, or rather you will only be saved if you have faith in the God who told me that you're going to be okay. This speaks a little bit into the sovereignty of God and his desire, which is that his plan is for all of us to be saved.

But one of the requirements for us all to be saved is that we must still trust him. Because if we don't choose to trust him, even though it's his desire for us to be saved, if we deliberately choose to not trust him and to find our own way out, then we won't actually be saved.

Of course, if I'm the sailors, I'm distraught, because I thought I was going to make a way out. And yet this prisoner snitches on us. And now we're all stuck on the boat together.

As day was about to dawn, and Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, today is the 14th day. It's been two weeks that you've not eaten. Therefore, I urge you to take some food, for it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you.

[23:26] And when he said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God, and he began to eat. So he says, hey, you've not eaten for two weeks. You must eat so you can be strong, so you can survive this.

Because remember, my God said that you will be safe. My God said that no hair on your head will perish. Not of great comfort to me, but of great comfort to you or Aaron.

I mean, Aaron and I and the rest of us, that promise came too late. But then what we see here is really interesting.

Who wrote the book of Acts again? Luke. What book did Luke also write? The book of Luke. Just entertain me for two minutes as we take a little bit of a diversion.

Luke chapter 21. So Luke quotes Paul in that chapter, but he's not actually quoting Paul.

[24:28] He's actually quoting God. He's actually quoting Jesus. Because that phrase, that phrase, if you look at Luke chapter 21, verse 10, Jesus is foretelling wars and persecution.

Let me quickly read it to us. Luke chapter 21, verse 10. And then he said to them, nations will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes and in various places, famines and pestilences.

And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. But before all this, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. And you will be brought

before kings and governors for my namesake.

What a pep talk. What a way to hype up his crew just before he leaves. This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it, therefore, in your minds, not to meditate before and how to answer.

For I will give you a mouth and wisdom which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends and some of you, they will put to death.

[25 : 29] You will be hated by all for my namesake. The pep talk of a lifetime. But, verse 18, but not a hair of your head will perish.

By endurance, you will gain your lives. Luke's writing this account on the shipwreck, saying what Paul said, but you better know that he also remembers that this line was taken from Jesus' mouth himself.

That there was a warning that suffering will come. That there was a warning that God will be with them. But with suffering, will then eventually lead to perseverance, character, and hope. With suffering, it will eventually lead to glory.

What he's saying here is there is no glory without suffering. Don't we sometimes approach the Christian faith saying, God, if I follow you, if I do everything right, then you will bless me.

And you look at this passage, whether it's Jesus talking in Luke chapter 21, or it's what's happening on the ship, on the shipwreck, two weeks in, without any food, it's the same.

[26 : 33] And yet here he says, not even a hair is going to be perishing from your head. What he's saying is you will gain your life. Even though you think you're not going to, I will save you.

But not until your purpose is carried out. And there will be suffering. I wonder, I wonder how many of us actually take that to heart.

One of my favorite passages in scripture is Paul writing to the Corinthians in the second letter in chapter four. He says, do not lose heart for our outer selves are wasting away day by day, but inner selves are being renewed day by day.

For the light momentary afflictions that we're experiencing right now, whatever storm it is, whatever challenge it is, whatever valley of the shadow of death that we're going through right now are nothing, are nothing when compared to the eternal weight of glory that awaits us.

When you look at Paul's life, when you look at how many times he has suffered, when you look at how many times he's been flogged, thrown into prison, shipwreck after shipwreck, and yet he keeps saying the same thing that none of this, none of this is going to compare at all.

[27 : 50] It'll be as a feather when compared to the eternal weight of glory that awaits us. So therefore, what? I press on toward the goal of Christ Jesus. Not only that, not only does he have that hope, he's trying to share that hope with other people.

So two weeks in, he lifts up the bread and he gives thanks to God and says, God, thank you for this. There is nothing to give thanks for. Two weeks on an ocean with motion sickness and no food.

And yet here he does, he gives thanks. They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. We were in all 276 persons in the ship. And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea.

They were so encouraged, they were like, okay, I think we're coming to the end of it. Let's throw out everything else that we have. 276 people. On that boat, 276, we can only say for certain that there were three who trusted in God.

Paul, Luke, and Aristarchus. That's three to 276. The ratio there is one to 92 of Christians. I wonder what your ratio is.

[28 : 59] When you go back into your workplace, when you go back into your families, I wonder what your ratio is as someone who believes in Christ and around those who do not. What we see here is the ratio is not really for him.

The favors, the odds are not really for him here. And yet you better believe as this boat approaches the shore that all of these people are going to trust in God or at least have respect that this God is out there. Right?

And so what happens here is this. Now when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach. And so they're like, okay, let's do this. Let's get as close as we can as possible, lower the anchor, and then maybe we can all get off.

But again, that wasn't Paul's promise. That wasn't God's promise to Paul. Paul said, none of you will die, but the ship is going to go. Isn't that interesting? That God will save us, but he won't save

the established institutions and all the things that we have that we rely on right now.

He won't save those things. That is not in his interest to save those things. It's not in his interest to save your career or to save your ambitions or to save this or that or to save all the things or your bank accounts. His interest, his only interest is in you and in your soul.

[30:08] And so the ship doesn't make it. So they try as much as they can to do it, but the ship still crashes. And it has no way of getting to the land. And so basically when they all crash, they're all in the water. Verse 42, the soldier's plan was to kill the prisoners lest any should swim away and escape.

Remember, these soldiers, they were in charge of these prisoners and what would happen if they lost a prisoner? They themselves would get punished and killed. So they're like, well, better you than me. Let's just kill all of them now.

And this is where Juju steps in again. Julius says, no, we've got to listen to this guy. This guy is on to something. We need to protect him. And so he does protect him, but the centurion wishing to save Paul kept them from carrying out their plan.

He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land and the rest on planks or on pieces of ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to the land. Where did they end up?

They ended up on this tiny, tiny island in the Mediterranean called Malta. Who's been to Malta before? A few. I personally haven't been to Malta, but I have a good friend who actually goes there regularly.

[31:11] He says, this is this beautiful island. This beautiful island that actually with a lot of very kind, nice people that we also see in scripture. Malta's one of those countries that actually was the first to actually have Christianity.

Why? Because of this shipwreck. The history of their church goes all the way back to AD 59 slash 60. And they showed this group, this 276 unusual kindness.

We're into chapter 28 now. Hey, that was pretty fast. Chapter 28. The native people showed us unusual kindness and later it says they entertained us hospitably and they kindled a fire and welcomed us all because it had begun to rain and was cold.

Those of you who grew up in Hong Kong, October, November is a beautiful, beautiful time weather-wise, right? Of course, this week we've been hit with the humidity and we're all grieving because of that. But if you grew up in Europe like me, October, November is when things start to get dark.

The clocks change. You don't see the sun and if you go to work, you go to work when it's dark and you finish work and it's still dark, right? And so it wasn't a good time so it was getting cold. And so what do they do? The Maltese, they actually host these people and say, let's keep you warm.

[32:17] Interestingly, Paul himself goes to help with the fire. The prisoner in chains goes to help and what happens here, verse 3, when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand.

Isn't that just the case? When you're trying to help other people, when you're trying to gather sticks to help people stay warm, to look after people, that's when the attacks come. And so the viper comes out and wraps on his hand. Really interestingly, these people, the natives on the island, they look at that and they think, okay, we know exactly what's happening here.

This guy, verse 4, no doubt this man is a murderer and though he has escaped from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live. How many of us have felt that? When we look at someone and bad is happening to them, go, that's because they are naughty people.

Because they're naughty people, then they are getting what they deserve. We have trouble in believing that good things happen to bad people and that bad things happen to good people. Of course, when we think about those things, we deem ourselves as the good people.

So when bad things happen to us, we're outraged that they would happen to us. Me? I've been at church all my life. I've been serving in youth group on the worship tier and now this happens to me? You see, they had got it wrong.

[33:34] That isn't how things work. Jesus himself says in Matthew that actually the sun shines on the righteous and the unrighteous. The rain falls on the righteous and the unrighteous just because you are a follower of Christ.

Just because you are the one, even though you're in chains, you're still loving other people and trying to build the fire for them to keep them warm, the attacks will still come against you. And actually, it isn't the gospel that good things happen to good people.

That is not the gospel. Okay? What is the gospel? The gospel is that the worst thing happened to the best person. That is the gospel. That the only one who is good, Jesus, had this happen to him so that we, those who don't deserve it, now get to live as he lived.

So these guys don't really get it so they're like, oh, he escaped the shipwreck, he escaped the two weeks but he's still going to die. Why? Because he's a bad person. He must be a murderer. But they watch this snake come off his arm and then fall and they're waiting.

Can you just imagine those people like, oh, we've seen this before. This happened to so-and-so's son. Oh, let's give him a few minutes and he'll be gone. And yet, Paul is alive and well. And it's funny how quickly they change.

[34 : 42] They go from, he's a murderer to he's a god. They're like, there is special favor on this man. And so what happens here is, they all, verse six, they were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down but when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.

Now, in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island. So the chief guy is called Publius who received as an entertainer hospitably for three days. So actually, they stay in Malta for these three days.

They go to the chief's house and they live there and it actually so happens that the chief's dad is really sick and what does Paul do? Even as a prisoner, he's like, let me help this man. Can you see the relentlessness of Paul?

He's like, look, I have a bigger purpose. I have something really important to do and yet I'm going to stop and I still care for you. I'm going to look after you and I'm going to heal your dad. It reminds me a little bit of Jesus.

Jesus came to earth with this sole mission to save mankind, to pay the ransom for many. Luke 4, he says, I must go to the other towns as well to preach the good news of Christ, of the kingdom of God.

[35 : 45] And yet he would constantly get interrupted, constantly get stopped and still be very willing to help the people around him. I wonder whether for us when we have our big life plans, are we willing to stop and still care for those immediately around us?

Paul's plan was to get to Rome, to stand in front of Caesar and yet accidentally he ends up saving a whole island, Malta. My friend who I was asking about this, he said Malta is actually 96% Christian. In fact, the Catholic faith is still so strong there. It still, you could describe a godly state. But remember, it started off not that way.

Before the shipwreck, that wasn't the case. Can you see again the sovereignty of God? That if this shipwreck didn't happen, the people of this island would not be saved? And yet here we go.

And so what happens is they stay on the other house and not only that, when the chief's dad gets healed, everyone else on the island is like, whoa! And so they bring all their relatives, all their friends who were sick and the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured by accident.

[36 : 57] At least in Paul's mind, this whole island gets saved because of this shipwreck. The sovereignty of God, brothers and sisters. They also honored us greatly and when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed.

At this point, I'm looking at Paul going, Paul, just stay. You could be the king of Malta. You could start a nice church in Malta. You can call it Malta the Gathering and you can just hang out there, be respected and be loved, no more prison and just live there.

It's a nice place. Just get through the winter and it'll be nice and yet Paul doesn't stay. He never stays. In fact, none of the people in the book of Acts end up staying where they are most comfortable. They just keep on going and it tires me out reading it and yet it's not tiring for them because they just have this relentless push towards the mission.

So after three months, they do set sail and they head off and they end up in a verse, verse 13, end up in a place called Butioli and there we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days again.

Everywhere he goes, I would love that. Everywhere I go, there's a whole group of people that welcome. Say, we've heard of what you've done. We love what you've done and we're here to support you and care for you. And so they keep going and there we found brothers there and when

we came to Rome, a whole other group come to look after him as well.

[38:16] What an encouragement. Actually, you see here, this Paul, this Paul who survived everything on seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage. He needed his friends to give him courage.

He needed his friends to keep pushing on the road as well. Now, this group from Rome are particularly different. Actually, Paul starts a lot of churches. He's the most prolific church planter in the history of the church.

Ephesus, Corinth, all these, Philippi, he starts all these. But Rome, he doesn't start. Rome is actually not part of his CV. The believers in Rome, they would have been, if we go all the way back to Acts 2, when the Jews would all gather in Jerusalem where Pentecost happens, it says there were also Jews from Rome.

These would have been the people who were filled with the Holy Spirit back at Pentecost and went back to Rome and started living it by the Spirit, focusing on Jesus. So it was this group that came to hang out with him.

So they would have been new to him. Though he, of course, we see a letter that he wrote to them called the Book of Romans now. And so he gets to Rome and from there, when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself with the soldier who guarded him.

[39:21] Which prisoner gets to do that? Hey, you are a prisoner, you are finally in Rome, you're going to be tried by Caesar and yet here's your own house. And you can live in this house by yourself. You don't even need to share the room with anyone or share the flat with anyone.

All you need to do is have a guard with you. Now, there are inconveniences to that because historians believe most likely he would have had to have been chained to that guard. But can you imagine being chained to Paul?

Can you imagine spending 24-7 with this guy who just would not shut up about the kingdom of God? You see in the Book of Philippi chapter 1 verse 12 he says, I want you to know brothers, what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel to all the imperial guard.

Everyone knows why I'm here now. I keep telling the guy who's chained to me why I'm here and I'm sharing the gospel with them. Can you imagine just being, oh my goodness, it's my turn with Paul again. Though I would have thought there'd be other people who'd be like, hey, get yourself chained to this guy.

There's something special, there's something different about this guy. Stay to him and you'll see something interesting. What if someone was chained to us?

[40:31] What would they see? If someone was chained to you, Alex Lee, what would they see about your life? What would they see your love being?

Alex is currently going through Lent, so he's quit all kind of online sports kind of entertainment and all that, because he's an avid, avid sports follower, so he wouldn't see that, they wouldn't see that. But if a soldier was chained to Matthew, what would they see?

I ask myself that question. If I had a soldier chained to me 24-7, what would they see about my life and would it point to Jesus? My greatest fear is that they were chained to me and my life would look nothing different to this.

Oh, you have this good news and yet you don't really live in this good news, you look just the same as me, you struggle just in the same way. In fact, there's areas of hypocrisy about you that I don't actually like, so whatever God that you worship, whatever book that you read, I don't really want to read that because it doesn't really bring any change.

That's the thing that I'm most afraid of. And yet, Paul, we know whoever's chained to him is going to hear about the good news of Jesus Christ, who's going to be impacted and everyone who meets him.

[41:47] there's no halfway house with Paul. You either are just astonished by what he does and you think that he's a God or you want to kill him because it's so offensive to you.

So he stays there. He stays there and then he invites the Jewish leaders and he invites the church over there and he basically, what happens here is, from verse 23, we're going to fast forward a little bit, from morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus, both from the law of Moses and from the prophets.

What we see here is that people come to hear about the gospel from Paul, the Jewish leaders and the church in Rome themselves and again the same thing happens. Some are convinced, verse 24,

some are convinced and others disbelieved.

So even towards the end of his life, Paul is doing the same message. In different ways, by the way, in 1 Corinthians 9 he says that to the Jews I'm a Jew, to the Greeks I'm a Greek, last week we saw that actually to the Pharisees he would speak like this, to the Sadducees like this, to the Greeks like this, so he would change the way he speaks, which actually tells me one thing, and I was talking to a friend about this yesterday, that actually sometimes when we watch how people share the gospel, sometimes it's a little bit distasteful, sometimes it's the same thing every time.

But what he's seeing here, what we see here is that if we're going to share the gospel that's led by the Holy Spirit, there are different ways to share the same message. And we have to be sensitive and we can't just go around bashing people around the heads with the Bible.

[43:16] We rely on the Holy Spirit and go, what does that person actually need to hear? How can I care for that person and share the gospel in a way that actually they understand, that they can actually connect to, all while completely saying, look, whether they actually accept it or not is not in my control.

The greatest church planter in the world still had, even to the very end, people who were convinced and people who disbelieved. It is okay when you go to that relative and you share with them the gospel and they say, I don't care, you say, okay, but I will still always care about you.

Let us be prepared for that kind of response. And the mixed responses that we got last week from Felix and from King Agrippa, these will be happening to us too.

And so it happens and then he quotes scripture, Isaiah, and basically what he's saying here is go to his people and say you will indeed hear but never understand and you will indeed see but never perceive that there are people whose hearts are just simply not there.

Here's a quick tip. When we go and share the gospel or when we're about to go to something where we know there's someone there who we might need to share the gospel with, pray for that first and first. Ask for the Holy Spirit to move them because it's not going to be your words that convinces them.

[44:25] It's going to be the Holy Spirit doing something in them already and maybe you just get to be a part of it. So you ask the Holy Spirit, hey, I'm about to meet this uncle and this uncle is a pain in the backside and he is so arrogant and he thinks he knows everything but God if there's something that you want me to do, if there's something that you want me to say, would you tell me?

I'm listening and still be prepared that it won't work. Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God which was first to the Jews but because you've rejected it now is being sent to the Gentiles and they will listen.

He lives there for two years, welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God, teaching about Lord Jesus with all boldness and without hindrance, full stop, end of chapter, end of book.

And just like when I watch a TV show, the finale finishes and it just stops and I was like, but what about Caesar? We've been waiting for Caesar.

Okay, so I'm not a very creative, artsy kind of person but I know there are here who, those of you who are. Have you watched those movies that are really creative and kind of in the festival kind of films that just end when they're not supposed to end and you just finish and you're like, what just happened there?

[45:52] Okay, I am not those kind of Venice Film Festival people. I'm a Hugh Grant kind of rom-com person where there's a good high and then there's a low but it always finishes high. I just need that finish.

I just need Hugh Grant to learn that he's hopeless without this girl and so they get together. Two weeks notice. I highly recommend it. It's a great film. I need that and yet here it just stopped.

Do you get what I'm saying? Isn't this a little bit like, huh? And then as I was pondering over this, it made me think, it's one of those times where you sit in the film and the movie just stops and the screen goes black and then it turns into a mirror.

The movie stops and you're expecting Paul to be the one that saves Western civilization. You're expecting Paul to be the one that shares the gospel in such eloquent ways to Caesar that it ends up causing Caesar to change the whole religion of the Roman Empire.

That ends up spreading the gospel to the rest of the world and that we can just sit here on this nice comfy cinema seat and just watch the kingdom of God move and leave it there. And in reality, the movie stops there.

[47:08] It blacks out, turns into a mirror and then looks at you and I and says, now it's your turn. Psych. It was never about Paul. It was about you.

It was about you. It was about you, Sybil. It was about you, Bill. It was about you, Ethan. The kingdom of God keeps moving and it's not about the people who carry the message, but it's the message itself that is unstoppable.

And that message, that word was the one that became flesh. That message is Jesus Christ himself and Jesus Christ keeps moving with or without us.

I think that's why Luke decides we're done here. I would have wanted to find out what happens to Paul, if I'm honest. Now later we do, historians believe that actually he ends up in Rome and actually he ends up actually being able to leave.

Why? Because in Rome, he writes quite a few letters to the churches in the past. So Ephesians, Philippians, these were him writing it during these two years under house arrest. And actually he says to the church in Philippi, I can't wait to come and see you again.

[48:21] I'm going to send Timothy to you first, but I'm going to come and hang out with you afterwards as well. So actually I'm encouraged. Actually Paul doesn't get arrested here. He doesn't die here. So he actually gets to leave and then he goes and historians believe he then gets to go to Spain where he continues to spread the gospel and have tapas.

And from there, he actually has a good few years of where he continues to share the gospel without hindrance until what we believe is Emperor Nero in 64. So it's four or five years after this, he actually ends up in front of Nero again.

And then that's when he gets close to his end. And that's when he gets put into a dungeon. And that's when he writes those words that JP read for us at the beginning. That I have fought the good fight.

And I've poured myself out and I am now reaching my end. And that's where I get emotional. That's where I get sentimental. I'm like, man, he's reached the end and yet he's still pressing on in the same way.

But he's still very much a human being. Why? Because he tells Timothy in 2 Timothy, this is probably his final letter. He says, please come to me soon. Do your best to come to me soon.

[49:31] And when you come to me, can you bring my coat? Why bring my coat? Because this dungeon is cold. And can you bring with me my books as well?

Because I still want to read. I still want to grow. I still want to learn. Others left me the first time I met Caesar. But you have stayed with me. Would you come and spend my final few days with me?

Later, after writing that letter, he will then be dragged out. And be executed. Till the end. Till the end, Paul continues to go.

How does he have that kind of peace? I think we can go all the way back. And this is where the emotional part of the movie will come.

Where all his old scenes flashback. The moment he's trying to kill. The moment he's overseeing the execution of Stephen. The moment he gets blinded in Damascus. The moment he goes to all these different houses and meets all these different people.

[50:30] Teaches all these people in Athens, in Ephesus. And then you see, just at the end, he's in the dungeon. And then you can just see this play out as a movie. And Paul says, this is not the end for me.

Why does he have that kind of peace? It's because he met Jesus Christ. Because he encountered him and had his life completely changed. That he was once blind, but now that he sees, he was once lost, but then he was found.

That's why he was so selfless. That's why he was so fierce. How do we keep that peace and stand firm in the midst of the storm?

We do it because we recognize that we're not stood there alone. That in the middle of that storm, an angel of the Lord stands right next to Paul and reminds him of his purpose, reminds him of where he's going and reminds him who is in control.

Many of you know my favorite book is the book of Philippians. And at the end of that, he says, rejoice. Again, I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.

[51:40] The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, with prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God that surpasses understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

So you can stand in that storm knowing that Christ himself stands right there with you and that will give you peace. That passage, do not be anxious about anything.

I love it. We put it in a fridge magnet. We put on key rings to remind ourselves to not be anxious. But what's the key there? I don't think it's even do not be anxious. I think it's a few verses before, a few words before that says, the Lord is at hand.

Do not be anxious about anything. The Lord is near, so you don't have to be anxious. You don't have to be anxious because right there in the middle of your storm is Christ holding your hand. Paul can stand in that storm and not be afraid and said, I will not lose and you will not lose any more hairs because this guy stood right here, is with us.

[52:43] Because the thing that you fear the most, death itself, the thing that you're worried about whilst you're stood in this storm right now, you can take heart.

Why? Because this guy was thrown into the storm for us. And because he was thrown into the storm for us and he dealt with that death, the death now has no more sting and then he rises again so we can stand here and not be anxious about anything.

We can give thanks. We can take communion in front of 272 people who don't know Christ. Why? Because we know who Jesus is and we know what Jesus did for us. Isn't that powerful?

Isn't that beautiful? Doesn't that charge you to go out and share that good news? That in your boat is Christ himself. Jesus himself says, I am the greater Jonah.

Jonah was thrown into the storm to satisfy the wrath of God. And yet Christ comes along and says, I was, I am the greater Jonah.

[53:48] And because I was thrown into the storm, you now don't have to worry about your storms and continue to fight the good fight to run the race.

So as Christians, we can cope with suffering. We can deal with suffering because we know that without suffering, there is no glory. That we have a suffering servant, a suffering king who took on all the pain, who took on all the grief, who took on the consequences of our sin and yet rose again.

For those who have friends who ask, well, if there is a good God, why is there so much evil? We cannot let God off the hook with evil. You can say, well, Jesus himself is God's answer to that evil. That he did not let evil off the hook. In fact, Jesus himself was placed on the hook. In God, we have someone who is willing to stand with us in the storm, to sit with us in the mud because he died the death that we deserved so we would have the life and life to the full.

And the story finishes. Acts is done. There's movements in churches. I mean, Acts 29 is one of them, right?

[55:13] Where, hey, you don't have to sit here and wonder where this finale ends because it hasn't ended because that black screen is now in a mirror and it looks at you and I and says, what will you do?

First, it was Pentecost. Then it was Stephen. Then it was Peter. Then it was Paul. Then it was Cornelius. Then it was Aristarchus.

Then it was Luke. And now it is you. And now it is me. It's never been about the acts of the apostles.

It's always been about the acts of the Holy Spirit through the apostles. The acts of the Holy Spirit through you and I. And as we finish this series on the book of Acts, and as we look, today is Palm Sunday where we prepare our hearts for the entrance of Christ, the triumphal entry.

Let us spend that time now pondering on the power of the cross because it isn't going to be lofty speech or wisdom. It will not be your eloquent words that will argue that uncle down or that colleague who doesn't care.

[56:21] It will be the Holy Spirit that moves hearts. And can we pray for those people? Because whilst we have Jesus in our boat, Mark 4 says, remember, and on that lake when he calmed the storms, there were other boats as well.

There are people in your influence, in your sphere, in your workplace, in your families that are in their boats, terrified, with all hope lost.

And in our boat, there is Jesus. What? So if you've not got any motivation to share the gospel, then think about that. That you face your storms with Christ in your boat and yet there are other boats out there that have no hope.

Let us share it. I'll spend a moment now just to pray and reflect on the word of God and then we'll respond in song. So Lord, the movie comes to a seemingly awkward and abrupt end until we realize

that it's not ended yet.

that there are more chapters being written right now as we speak detailing the acts of the Holy Spirit through your people.

[58:03] Speak. Your servants are listening. Fill us up and send us out. Amen. Amen. And we cling on to the promise, the truth.

The Lord, you remain sovereign over us, over all our circumstances. And just like Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane, we declare, sometimes in pain, yet not my will, but yours.

We entrust ourselves to your sovereign plan. Amen. Thank you.