

4) Remain Calm Even During the Storms

Acts 17:13-26 • 2021-06-27 • Series: Defy Expectations



Have you ever witnessed someone during a crisis? The movies don't always get it accurate. Not everyone is cool on camera and able to act out for an action film. Most people crumble, panic, and are tossed into despair. Consider how you would respond facing your next crisis. What if you had to evacuate your home overnight and it was all lost to fire within hours? Picture yourself in a crowded room with a deranged shooter. Most in that situation are surprised at how they respond with shock and freeze up. Most of us probably go through some sort of phase of shock when we face great dangers. How can you prepare for the next crisis to hit your life? You don't have to face your next crisis unprepared. You can defy expectations as you remain clam even during the storms. How? We see our answer as we continue our series "Defy Expectations." Today we'll look at three Christians in Acts 27 who stand out in a ship with hundreds of men as they remain calm during a severe crisis. And we'll consider how we remain calm even during the greatest crisis.

The apostle Paul had plans to sail to Rome so that he could share the gospel there. As it turned out he was now headed to Rome. Only it wasn't the way he might have chosen to travel. Through a series of events, he ended up traveling to Rome under guard as a prisoner. But Paul remained clam. One way or another God intended for him to make it to Rome.

A centurion named Julius took Paul and a number of other prisoners on a private sailing vessel. They made it to a port in Macedonia. Then they boarded a larger merchant ship loaded with grains from Egypt and bound for Rome. It was no doubt on its way to feed to hungry mouths of the Roman Empire. Along with Paul were two of his traveling companions, Aristarchus and Luke who wrote the book of Acts. Altogether there were 276 people on board the ship including the sailing crew, Roman soldiers, merchants, and other prisoners.

The ship made slow progress for several hundred miles. As they dragged along you can just picture the sailors saying to themselves, "I've got a bad feeling about this." The ship's pilot was cutting it close. He apparently had it in mind to make it to Rome one last time before winter. He had no doubt sailed that route before. He knew the risks. He knew that travel in the Mediterranean Sea would become impossible over the winter months. But he no doubt knew the good profits he stood to gain by making this journey. He was willing to take the risk. But was he ready to face a crisis?

After about 500 miles of slow sailing, they arrived at the island of Crete. They began to cut along the southern end of the island and came to a harbor. Paul knew they were headed for danger and that the stormy season was soon going to be underway. He advised that they halt there for the winter. "If we go on, we'll face great loss," he warned.

But the ship's pilot had other plans. He was hoping to make it just twelve miles further along the shore to a harbor at Phoenix. That harbor had 8000-foot-high mountains range with ridges that would provide a suitable place to harbor for the winter. They were going to need protection from the strong northeastern winds. Julius the Centurion sided with the ship's pilot. They all disregarded Paul's warning and set out towards Phoenix. They wanted to reach that harbor before the high winds of winter came.

Paul and his companions could do nothing but come along for the ride. The short journey to Phoenix started out favorably. They felt like they would close those last twelve miles with ease. But Paul had been right about his warning. They would never make it to Phoenix. The strong northeastern winds began. They were about to face a severe crisis.

Have you ever faced a crisis because things were beyond your control? I'm sure it must have been frustrating for Paul to be a prisoner and made to come along this foolish leg of the journey. He knew they were in danger but couldn't stop it. Maybe you have faced great danger beyond your control. Imagine someone who campaigns for fire-wise practices and proper forest management but has to flee his burning home because so few would listen to him. What about the wife who sees her family is crumbling because her husband didn't listen to her warning that the demands of a new job would tear the family apart? She saw it coming but couldn't advert the disaster. Will she be able to handle the crisis she warned them about? What about the parent who warns his son about the abuse of drugs only to see his warnings disregarded? How long until he regrettably has the police come to his door in the middle of the night regarding a car crash or he hears how his son has ruined his life and taken the life of another? What about the friend who warns his friend about his drinking habits? How long until it consumes him with all his loved ones? Facing a crisis is hard. Facing one that you knew was coming and warned against has to be devastating.

When a crisis hits it can crush the hopes of everyone. The crew on Paul's ship endured many days of being battered by the wind. The strong storm raged on so long that they went several days without seeing the sun or the stars. It got so bad that they even decided to toss overboard all the precious cargo and all the grain. Fourteen days passed and they had endured hundreds of miles of being blown around. They constantly were under the threat of crashing into some rocky shore. They did all they could to keep the ship from tearing apart under the beating of the waves. They were helpless, weak, and giving up all hope. The storm beat on them so much they had lost all remaining hope of rescue.

Then the Lord sent Paul words of hope to share with the rest of those on board. When all were despairing, he spoke up to give courage. *“Men, you should have followed my advice and not set sail from Crete and avoided this damage and loss. But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because there will be no loss of life among you. Only the ship will be lost. In fact, last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand before Caesar. And surely God has graciously given you all those who are sailing with you.’ So keep up your courage, men, because I believe God that it will be exactly the way I have been told. However, we must run aground on some island.”*

Paul remained clam. He knew God intended him to make it safely. God’s messenger had told him, “Do not be afraid.” And Paul said in faith to his shipmates, “I believe God that it will be exactly the way I have been told.” That’s what our faith is built on. Our fears are removed because we are fully convinced things will go exactly as our God has told us. We can echo with Paul in every crisis, “I believe God that it will be exactly the way I have been told.”

Don’t misunderstand. God never said Paul wouldn’t face a crisis. In fact, he said that the ship would be destroyed. And don’t misunderstand. God doesn’t promise to send us an angel with a special message in each crisis. But he does give us his Word. And his Word is enough to provide a calming peace for us in every crisis.

Paul didn’t just hold to the promises of God. He spoke of them to the crushed and despairing around him. He shared his hope and the reason he could remain at peace in the storm. Share the hope you have to those in crisis. Is there a home that is being lost to fire? This whole world will burn. But God has promised an eternal home that will never perish. Is there a Christian family despairing of ruin because the husband and father is absent and chasing after wealth? God will not abandon his children. And the Christian father can let go of his pursuit of wealth and trust in the Lord as he builds up his home on the Word of the Lord. Is there a son or daughter losing everything to drug abuse? Don’t panic and write them off as a loss. Be the Christian friend or family member that reminds them God is gracious and has spared them to live another day. Point them to the hope and meaning you have in life from the Lord and his promises. Is there a friend someone stuck in the destructive abuse of alcohol ready to toss his life away? Give him courage as you lead him away from destruction and despair to the Word of God.

God’s Word always gives courage to those who listen. That courage comes because he has removed our greatest troubles. Our greatest trouble is that we deserve to die for our sins. Every crisis pales in comparison to death and the fires of hell. Foolishly we all once thought we could avoid those dangers. We refused to listen to his warning against the foolishness of sin. We were worse than a foolish ship captain trying to get rich or a centurion hoping to make good time in the face of danger. We ignored the warnings of our God regarding our own foolish actions. Each one of us deserves far more than a crisis. We deserve our God to abandon us to the depths of our sin the holy wrath of God over each sinner.

But God’s Word gives us courage. He reveals we don’t get what we deserve. But he has promised to graciously spare our lives. To spare us all he didn’t just come along as a prisoner on a ship. He willingly came to this dying and cursed world to live among us. The Son of God came in human flesh to a world that ignored his warning over sin for thousands of years. But he came to take the great crisis and suffering we all deserved. It wasn’t a storm he bore. He bore the divine justice over our sins. Jesus came to face the greatest distress as he bore our sins on the cross.

And you don’t have to look for an angel of the Lord to come to you with a word of rescue. We only have to look to those angels who came at to Bethlehem and said, “A savior has been born to you, Christ, the Lord.” And those angels who stood by the empty tomb who said, “He is not here. He is risen!” We know the Word shared with us. God intends to bless us and to give us eternal life! He will take us out of this crisis-filled world to his eternal kingdom.

Paul had the opportunity to share the news of rescue with his crew. That’s what Paul was all about and why he was on that ship. He lived to share the news of God’s rescue with the world. We share that promise with those living in fear and uncertainty. We build up courage and remove despair as we calmly and confidently share God’s revelation to us. Do you know someone who is facing a crisis? Bring them unexpected words of comfort from God’s Word. Tell them of his greatest rescue. Don’t let them suffer and die without hearing about the God who you belong to and the God who you serve.

Defy expectations. Most would expect you to crumble and panic. That’s what you’d expect from anyone in a crisis. And yes, a Christian still feels the pains of loss. You will still face things that cause you to break down in tears and to tremble. But you will not face anything that will leave you in despair. Instead, it will lead you to rely on the Word’s and promises of your God. It will lead you to remain calm as you trust in the Lord’s working. The same Lord who once calmed the storms and quieted the waves is the Lord who guided the ship Paul was on. And he will guide your life to accomplish all that he has planned and all he has promised. Remain clam. One way or another God intends for you to make it to your home.