

# Acts 27:1-44

## Outward Church: Trust the Pilot

*Rev. Jonathan M. Romig / February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022*

Flight 5220 took off “from Magadan Airport, just north of the Sea of Okhotsk in far eastern Russia” this last December.<sup>1</sup> Shortly after takeoff, the airplane threw its almost 200 passengers down, then up, and the plane dove, then recovered. One aviation website reports, “Picture one of those terrible C-grade Hollywood movies that show an airliner out of control, with baggage bins coming open, carry-ons floating through the cabin and oxygen masks dropping. It was that kind of awful. And it lasted for more than an hour.” People screamed and prayed, and the pilot tried to make an emergency landing at the airport they had just taken off from but failed and had to fly on to a different airport.

I wrote this part of my sermon before I flew down to The Nineveh Network’s church-planting meeting a couple of weeks ago (CCCC). Part of me wondered if the Lord was going to help me “live out” this part of the message, but my flight was smooth. What do you do when your life feels out of control? Hold on for dear life? What do you do when you hit turbulence? Scream, and pray? You might have guessed from my sermon title today, but I have a different response in mind. What if we were to... trust the pilot?

Paul’s life has been in turbulence for a long time, but it’s gotten especially bad lately. He spent the last two years in prison because of a corrupt official, Felix, and now he’s on his way to Rome to appeal his case. God told Paul he was sending him to Rome (Acts 23:11), so you would think things would go smoothly, wouldn’t you? Sometimes God calls us to do something, but he doesn’t tell us the skies will be blue. Sometimes we hit turbulence, and it’s in those moments that we have an opportunity to trust our pilot.

Paul sails through storms on his way to Rome. God doesn’t spare him turbulence. I find Acts 27 to be a fascinating chapter because it shows the historicity of the book of Acts. It’s full of nautical and topographic details that are true to the Mediterranean. The way Luke wrote this chapter shows its authenticity and trustworthiness. Luke was on the boat with Paul, which is why he uses “we” language, and he recounts the journey in detail. I’m going to walk us through the journey to help us see God’s faithfulness to Paul.

Paul and some other prisoners are handed over to Julius, a Centurion over 100-soldiers. It’s his job to take Paul to Rome for his trial before Caesar Nero (v1). So they board a ship that is originally from Adramyttium and is headed home in the same direction they want to go (v2). Aristarchus, a Greek, and Luke are with Paul. God gave Paul brothers-in-Christ for the journey. They go through it too. Who has God given you to walk with life through? Your church family and brothers and sisters in Christ.

They sail to Sidon, which only takes a day (v3). Things are going well. We can do this! Sometimes the skies will be blue, and the path will be clear. And on days like that, you’re free to walk around the cabin. Your pilot will still take you to your destination, even when the storm clouds come. But sometimes, the chime will ding, and you need to fasten your seatbelt.

They sail out into the sea where they encounter winds pushing against them, so they sail across the open sea off Cilicia and Pamphylia (v4-5). They land at Myra in Lycia. They board a new ship from Alexandria in northern Egypt sailing for Italy (v6). They sail to Cnidus but change course due to heavy winds, sailing to the lee of Crete opposite Salmone and landing at Fair Havens.

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<sup>1</sup> Russian Airline Crew Lauded As ‘Heroes’ After Icing-Induced Emergency by Mark Phelps, December 7, 2021  
<https://www.avweb.com/aviation-news/russian-airline-crew-lauded-as-heroes-after-icing-induced-emergency/>.

But Fair Havens isn't a suitable place to stay for the winter; there wasn't even a city there—it was “near” Lasea (v8). Paul warns Julius, his Centurion, not to keep sailing. This is the moment he's going to remind them of when disaster strikes, literally saying, “I told you so!” (v21). But the centurion doesn't listen and tries to sail them to a more suitable harbor at Phoenix on Crete.

**Acts 27:11 (NIV)**

But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship.

There comes a moment in all our lives when we have to decide who we want to pilot our ship. Will Christ pilot our ship? Will we do life his way? Or will we do life the pragmatic way? The utilitarian way? The way that makes us the most money or gets us the richest life? Who will pilot your ship, you or Jesus? Inevitably, when we pilot ourselves, we head towards disaster. God made us, so he knows how it all works. Now in Paul's story, God was steering Paul, and he brought him to disaster. So being in a disaster is not necessarily a sign that we're doing things our way, but it should cause us to pause, pray, and self-examine.

They set sail from Fair Haven, but before long, a hurricane-force wind called the “Northeaster” sweeps them away from Crete. In Greek, this word is literally east wind (euros) and north wind (akylo) put together (eurakylon), or “Nor-Easter.” They are driven south of a small island called Cauda. And that's when things really got bad. They are caught in a storm and driven out into the sea. They throw ropes around the ship to hold it together. They are afraid of running aground on sandbanks of Syrtis, a ship graveyard, and are driven out into the Mediterranean.

No matter how many maps or pictures I show you, it's not going to capture the thunder and lightning, the wind and the waves, the absolute anxiety of being caught in the sea on a boat in a hurricane storm. But Luke describes such a “violent battering” (vehement assault) on the boat that the sailors start throwing cargo overboard. The whole reason they sailed was so they could get to Rome to make a profit, but they don't care about that anymore. They want to survive. They throw the ship's tackle overboard, the ship's rigging, its ropes, pulleys, and cranes. They jettison it all because they want to live. The author of Acts, Luke, tells us how bad it got.

**Acts 27:20 (NIV)**

When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.

That's pretty bad! I don't know where you are, but maybe you're at this place too. I've talked to some of you who are very discouraged. When the night is dark, and the storm is raging, who do we trust? The Centurion? The government official who made the pragmatic choice? The pilot of the ship who put his trust in money? Or do we trust in God? Trust the pilot. Trust God. Trust Jesus.

You know, God told Paul he'd make it to Rome, but he hadn't told Luke that. I wonder if Luke kept repeating to himself some of Paul's sermons about the resurrection. God is a good pilot, but he doesn't tell us if we'll make it through the storm. Luke could have been swept into the sea, but God still would have been good and faithful; he just would have expressed that goodness by taking him to glory with Jesus.

Think about Paul. He knew he was safe because God had called him to Rome, but he still exercised every precaution. Have you ever heard someone say, “Well if it's my time to go, it's my time to go,” right before they do something really stupid? Paul doesn't act that way. He knows God has a plan, but he tries to stay safe and care for the safety of those around him. God's plan includes our use of wisdom.

It's at this point that Paul gets up and says, "I told you so!" (v21). Thanks, Paul! But even as he says how right he was, he delivers good news. That's what the gospel is, good news in a dark night, good news for weary souls, good news for those in storms.

**Acts 27:23-26 (NIV)**

<sup>23</sup>Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me <sup>24</sup>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.' <sup>25</sup>So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. <sup>26</sup>Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."

Do you hear the good news? You're going to make it through, Paul! And not only you but all the lives of those with you. To me, this implies that Paul had been praying for everyone on the boat. He's been praying for Luke, and Aristarchus, for Julius, the Centurion, for the pilot of the ship, for the crew, and for all the passengers. Paul prays! Paul calls on the crew to have faith, but he still says they're going to run aground. Christians don't get to skip out on suffering and trial. We get to walk with Jesus through suffering and trial, knowing he went through it first at the cross. We know our pilot is good and will take us through, even if the seas are rough or we hit turbulence. And Jesus bears the ultimate storm, God's wrath so that we can pass safely through.

The ship gets closer and closer to shore. They can tell by measuring the depth of the sea. They're afraid they're going to be dashed into rocks, so they drop anchors and wait (v29). It's at this point that some sailors try to use the lifeboat to escape, but Paul stops them. He knows they can't navigate this final stretch without their crew. And then Paul shows not only his stubborn determination but his compassion and kindness. He stops the crew and invites them to break bread and eat.

Your pilot cares about you. Your pilot cares about your normal everyday needs. I flew on *JetBlue* recently, and they gave me cinnamon cookies. How much more does Jesus care about us? They eat, and throw the rest of the food grain into the sea, no hope of profit, no hope of anything but spared lives. How low is your pilot going to have to take you before you're desperate for him?

The crew cut the anchors, hoisted the foresail, and sailed towards the beach, but struck a sandbar, and the ship began to break apart. You would think that Paul had gone through enough, but here, with safety in sight, the soldiers try to kill the prisoners. If they escape, they could lose their lives. But the centurion stops them. God uses him to carry out his plans. Those who could swim swam to the shore. And those who couldn't swim grabbed planks and pieces of the ship and got to shore. And this is how chapter 27 ends:

"In this way everyone reached land safely." – Luke, shipwreck survivor

Do you trust your pilot? Flight 5220 took off from an airport in far eastern Russia and almost immediately experienced massive flight problems. And the pilot and crew flew that flight five hours over Siberia, and not a single life was lost. They tried to land in Yakutsk, but they couldn't because the temperature was -22 degrees Fahrenheit. So they flew on to Irkutsk, which was 30-degrees Fahrenheit. They think there was a problem with the deicing spray. Do you trust your pilot, no matter your circumstances?

Maybe, unlike Paul, you don't know where you're going. Jesus hasn't told you you're flying to Rome or elsewhere. Or maybe he has, but things aren't going as planned. Well, you can trust that your pilot is going to get you exactly where he wants you. You might need to strap on your seatbelt for turbulence, but you'll be okay because Jesus has you, whether you face sickness, famine, or even death. *Trust your pilot.*

Jesus is the one who knows what it's like to be tossed around in a storm in a boat on the sea of Galilee while his disciples try to battle the storm. And with just a word, he calms the sea (Mark 4:35-41). At the cross, he has born the rage of the storm so we can sail into eternal peace. Trust your pilot. Let's pray.

*Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this sermon at Cornerstone Congregational Church in Westford, MA. You can listen to his other sermons at [CornerstoneWestford.com](http://CornerstoneWestford.com).*

## Sources

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<https://avherald.com/h?article=4f10cac3>

## Discussion Time

**Ice-Breaker** – What’s your name, and what’s the worst weather you’ve ever been in?

**Emotion** - What’s one thing you’re looking forward to this week and one thing you’re not?

**Upward** – In ancient culture, the sea was a symbol of death, chaos, and fear. What do the stories of Paul’s shipwreck and Jesus rebuking the wind and waves tell us about God’s character?

**Inward** – What’s a storm you’ve passed through recently or are going through right now? How has God been faithful to you? Or how do you want him to show up at this time?

**Outward** – Who is going through a storm in your life? What from today’s message could you share with them that might give them hope in their storm? Go and do it. Trust your pilot.

**Recap** – What’s your one-sentence takeaway from today? Ask one volunteer from the group to share their recap in the sanctuary during the debrief.

## Spiritual Exercises

**Pray** – Ask God to show you any places where you can trust Jesus more, where you can trust your Heavenly Father more. Ask him to help you trust him if you struggle with this. Finally, pray about who needs to hear the good news of our good pilot. Walk-in line with your prayer.

**Worship** – Listen to “Jesus Savior Pilot Me” by Robbie Seay. This song means a lot to me as we sang it at my dad’s service. YouTube: <https://youtu.be/djoGVhxDLI4>

## Content Curation

**Sermon** – If you’re struggling with darkness, you could listen to my May 5, 2018 sermon, “Praying in the Dark,” from Psalm 18:1-19. I quote St. John of the Cross in it, a Spanish Priest who suffered from depression and felt overwhelmed. <https://cornerstonewestford.com/sermons/praying-in-the-dark-psalm-181-19/>