

The Perfect Storm

- I. Since Thanksgiving is coming up, listen to this Thanksgiving mishap by Neil Montana. He writes, *“My former roommate was the type of guy that always needed to impress. We were having 8 guests, and he really wanted to make a big to-do. He purchased an extra-large, 30-pound turkey for the event. He also purchased one of those disposable roasting pans made of aluminum foil, the kind with handles on the sides. After several hours of cooking (and multiple glasses of scotch), he opened the oven door to remove the turkey. I could see he was struggling and offered assistance, but he insisted he was fine. The laws of physics disagreed. As he removed the pan (sans the suggested cookie sheet or other recommended supporting device) by the handles, it collapsed inward, spilling the drippings onto the floor and (unfortunately) back into the oven. The resulting fireball was apocalyptic. My roommate lost his hair, eyebrows, and goatee – (and I would add here, the guests most importantly lost their turkey unless they liked theirs hard crispy). He learned three unfortunate lessons;*
 1. *Less is more.*
 2. *Cooking under the influence usually turns out badly.*
 3. *You can never fully remove the evidence of a massive grease fire from the ceiling of your apartment. “*
- II. I think, and the rest of us probably agree, that one bad decision (like not fully supporting an overweight Turkey) can lead to a “perfect storm” of events...beyond what we can imagine. This doesn't only happen with meal preparation but is true in life, period. And like we talked about last week in the story of the wise and foolish builder, the question is not *if* the storms of life will come but *when*. Storms of life being things think like job loss or loss of a loved one, broken marriage or relationships, disease or anything that leaves us or those we love hurting and reeling from emotional pain. Last week we talked about how to prepare for the storms when they come. Today we are talking about what to do while in the middle one.
- III. We will be looking at a storm story found in the book of Acts. This book was written by Luke, the writer of his namesake gospel. He was a Gentile, or non-Jewish, doctor. It tells the story of the birth of the early church and goings on of the first disciples. At times, it might come across as dry since it contains a long sermon or two. But other times it can read like an adventure novel, complete with shipwrecks, imprisonment, death harrowing feats, and even snakes...enough to make Indiana Jones flinch. Let's read one of those stories this morning found in **Acts 27**. But let's set the scene. Paul the church planter was arrested on trumped up charges for preaching about Jesus. He faced one trial after another and plots were hatched by the ruling religious leaders to have him killed. Since Paul was a Roman citizen he appealed to Caesar himself, a right of all Roman citizens at the time. It was decided, much to the chagrin of his enemies, they would send him by boat to Rome. Dr. Luke somehow managed to tag along with a detachment of Roman soldiers led by a centurion named Julius whom Paul befriended. We might ask, how did Luke talk his way on board? It would be like asking to ride on the prison bus with your BFF just to keep him or her

company. Unlikely, right? Well it was a different time with different rules, but more importantly a physician was like gold so the Roman guards and the sailors would have happily obliged. So sailing they do go. As we read the passage, here is the map of the route. **(image) Acts 27:3-44 NIV (post image instead of Scripture).**

- IV.** Has anyone been on a cruise, fishing boat or sailboat in the middle of a storm? This might sound funny but one of the most frightening moments I ever had on the water was not on a boat per se but a canoe in the middle of a huge lake in Maine with six-foot waves. My friend and I were tossed around like salad. Those six-foot waves felt like 60 as they almost swamped us and threatened to sink us and our gear. But imagine being in a boat in not just a storm but like in perfect storm fueled by a Nor'easter? What is that you ask? We rarely have Nor'Easters or So'Easters in North Carolina, do we? Nor'easter refers to the direction the wind is coming, from the Northeast to the Southwest, creating a mega cyclone or enormous tornado. They create one mother of a storm. I know it's kind of strange but believe it or not, we actually have footage of Paul and Luke's boat in the middle of this. **(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9Tdw5nG4dQ>)** Do you think I am taking poetic license by calling what Paul and Dr. Luke were going through a perfect storm? I don't think so. Reread **Acts 27:14 & 27 NIV** Get that? Hurricane winds and being tossed around for 14 days!! Not to be overly gross but imagine how many seasick bags they would have gone through? Almost no sleep, couldn't keep any food down...the horror would have been unbelievable. Not knowing if at any moment a tower-sized wave would come crashing down, taking you and everyone and thing to the bottom of the sea.
- V.** But how did it all begin? Reread **Acts 27:13 NIV**. Now I know Dr. Luke is not a meteorologist and has no knowledge of low-pressure systems nor had the slightest idea of El Nino, La Nina or how storms originate. But it's a fascinating detail and points out a truth in life whether Dr. Luke intended to or not. **Many of life storms begin by a seemingly small act or sin.** What seems like an innocuous "white lie" ends up creating a permanent breach of trust. Or that one harsh word leaves everlasting scars. Or that one slip of gossip ends up ruining someone's marriage. Or that one inappropriate come-on to a co-worker ends a career and devastates a family. James, Jesus' brother, puts it this way in his letter. **James 3:5 NIV** But this isn't only true about what we say but also the things we do or don't. Our actions also can create perfect storm in our life and the lives of those around us...often in the lives of those we love most.
- VI.** But let's focus on how the sailors and the passengers dealt with the storm itself. See if you can pick up a pattern. **Acts 27:18 NIV, 19, 32, 38, 42-47**. So what did they do to survive the storm? They chucked everything overboard! If it wasn't nailed down it was going over. And if it wasn't for Julius the centurion, they would have thrown Paul and the other prisoners over too. This is how it was done back then. And how it is done today. The maritime law clearly says (yes, you can find anything on the internet) that this is one of the approved

methods of saving a ship in the time of an emergency. Dumping your cargo. It helps with buoyancy and stability. Just imagine how painful it would have been for the owner and possibly the sailors who might have shared in some of the profit, throwing all their expensive spices, oils, salted lamb and wine overboard? It meant that despite all the hardships they were going through they would end up only losing money on this trip. But sometimes the only way we can survive the storm of life is to lighten our load. Get rid of those things holding us back and creating a barrier between us and God. **We need to let some things go so we can hold tighter to the things that really matter**

VII. I will say more about this in a minute but let's look at again what Paul says to the crew right in the middle of the storm. **Acts 27:21-26 NIV**. No one likes a "told you so" but at least Paul tempers it with a word of hope. But how did he describe his connection with God? As "the One who possesses Him." Now rid our mind of the slavery/master relationship but instead think Father/child. Or Old Testament with the Jews being God's chosen people, His beloved possession. Listen how one commentator put it "**God sends the storm and then allows its epic duration so that Paul and Luke and the others will discover that being the possession is far more important than having the possessions. And if God has to empty an entire ship of its cargo to prove the point God will do it.**" Here is the gist: we sometimes create the storms, even the "perfect" storms, in our lives by selfish or sinful actions; but sometimes God allows us or perhaps even sends the storms so we will turn to Him instead of clinging on and relying on our stuff, our bank account, our education, intellect, our position or a toxic relationship. Corrie Ten Boom, the middle-aged Dutch spinster who created an underground railroad of sorts for Jews to escape the holocaust, said this, "Hold everything in your hands lightly, otherwise it hurts when God pries your fingers open." And storms in life can do that for us, pry our hands open and force us to dump the things overboard that really don't matter.

VIII. And here is another truth, the **longer the storm, the lighter we travel**. The more we need to throw out those things holding us back and causing distance between us and God. I know a mother and father who lost a son in a terrible car accident. Now I don't believe God sent this storm into their life... it was just a case of reckless driving. I don't think there can be a worse storm than losing a child. In one of my conversations with the mother several years after the accident she said something to the effect "With our son's death, most things in our lives have become ridiculously unimportant...things like having a spot-free house, going on that perfect vacation or having the most fashionable clothes...those things no longer matter. All that matters now is God and our relationships. Everything else is extra baggage." She and her husband learned in the middle of their long storm to cling to Him tighter and to the stuff of earth less. To remember being God's beloved possession was infinitely more important than any possession they owned. They learned in the most painful ways to travel light and throw the frivolous overboard.

- IX.** Let's bring this home. Last week we talked about things we can do to deepen our relationship with God to prepare for the storm, but now I ask us to consider what things we need to stop doing or get rid of, whether we are in the middle of a storm or not? Some of the obvious are things like an addiction, inappropriate or toxic relationship, worshipping our stuff, and spending money on things that we don't need and having nothing left to give to God. These are all dangerous and if we are not careful they can sink us, especially if we cling to them rather than turning to Jesus. But there are other subtler things we might not even consider. Let me confess to you this morning, in the not too distant past I cared too much what people thought of me. My need not only to be loved but to be liked went too far. To the point where it just wasn't healthy. I would stay awake late at night worried that I said the wrong thing to Mrs. Johnson at a committee meeting or that I offended someone in a sermon or that I offended everyone in a sermon because it bored their socks off. But then something happened several years ago, where there was nothing I could do to make everyone happy. Based on God's leading I made a decision and because of a misunderstanding it hurt and even offended some of the people I loved most. My storm had come. It was one of the most painful times in my life. I felt so alone...and I simply couldn't make everything right. People were not going to like me no matter what I did. So I clung on to Jesus with all my might...and slowly began tossing overboard my need to please...to make everyone happy. I had to come to terms that what mattered most was not to be liked by everyone in my church or my community but that I was loved by the God of this universe and I was following His path as best I could. It was a painful perfect storm, but one I so needed and now years later am glad I went through.
- X.** How about you? You see, we don't have to wait for the storm to come to begin to lighten our load. Maybe it's not something as obvious as an addiction, or an inappropriate relationship or worshipping our stuff. Of course, these need to go no doubt. But maybe it's subtler...like pride...thinking too highly of ourselves and too low of everyone else. Maybe it's that we are overly critical, professional faultfinders of sorts. Or too arrogant to listen to anyone beside ourselves. Or maybe we are harboring deep down resentment, even hatred, for someone we feel has done us wrong. Sorry (but not too sorry) to be the one to tell you this, but these need to go too. Don't wait for that perfect storm to come. In fact, if we push these things overboard now with God's help, there is a good chance we might avoid that particular storm all together. Just remember the lesson that Paul and Luke learned thousands of years ago that we need to learn today: we need to let some things go so we can hold tighter to the things that really matter.