

ACTS 20:22–24; 21:10b–14

[PRELIMINARY REMARKS]

- [Welcome and Happy Mother's Day!]
- We're nearing the end of a series in Acts.
 - This morning I'm going to try to cover about six chapters in one sermon.
 - Which is either bold or foolish—or both!
- But don't worry—this will not be a 27-point sermon.
- Instead, we're going to look at the clear theme that unifies this whole section.
 - And I think it's a theme that will be deeply meaningful for many of us.
 - But before we get going, let's bow our heads in prayer.

[INTRODUCTION]

- There's a story people tell about buffalo and storms.
 - Apparently, when a storm rolls across the plains, cows tend to run away from it.
 - But buffalo do something different.
 - They turn toward it, face it, and then—walk into the storm.
 - And because they go into it instead of away from it, they actually get through it faster.
- Now, whether that story is scientifically precise, I don't know—but it's a great picture because it captures something about human nature.
 - We're often tempted to avoid hard things:
 - Change, hard conversations, obedience, repentance, suffering, grief, death.
 - We run away or look for a way around them.
 - But that can actually keep us trapped in them.
 - ***Sometimes the best thing to do is move into the storm.***
- We're in the book of Acts, thinking about what it means to be the church at its best.
 - We've watched Jesus build his church through ordinary people.
 - Thousands have found hope and healing for their lives.
 - And received the promise of eternal life in the world to come.
 - Recently, one man has been at the center of the mission—the Apostle Paul.
- But today, we come to the part of the story where Paul faces a deadly storm.
 - He's finishing his third missionary journey, opposition is increasing, and there are people who want to do him real harm.
 - Will he run away from it, or look for a way around? No—he walks into it.
 - In doing so, he shows us how to walk into our storms—and where we find the power to do it.

[CONTEXT]

- So let's join him in **Acts 20**—it's the summer of AD 57.
 - He's been on the road for years.
 - He's planted churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus.
 - And now he's heading back to Jerusalem.
- On the way, he stops at Miletus—just south of Ephesus, where we left him last week—and asks the elders of the church to come meet him.
 - They are his dear friends.
 - But he knows the time has come to say a final goodbye.
- So, in **V22** he says: Behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.
- Don't rush past that.
 - Paul knows what's coming.
 - In every city, the Spirit has been telling him: chains and pain await.
 - The clouds are gathering. The wind is picking up. The storm is coming.
 - And yet—he's walking toward it.
- As we move into **chapter 21**, the warnings get louder:
 - At Tyre, the **disciples** tell him not to go to Jerusalem.
 - At Caesarea, a **prophet** warns him of the dangers to come.
 - Even his own **friends** beg him not to go.
- But Paul is resolute—**V13**: What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.
 - These are powerful words.
 - He doesn't say:
 - *Don't worry, everything will be fine.*
 - *I'm sure it won't be that bad.*
 - Instead, Paul is the buffalo...
 - The storm is on the horizon...
 - And he turns his face toward it.

[Transition]: But then—the storm comes.

- And it's worse than any of the warnings suggested.
- Let me give you an overview of what happens to Paul in the next few chapters.

[CONTENT]

- He arrives in Jerusalem.
- Within days, a mob beats him within an inch of his life.
- The Romans drag him out of the crowd to keep him alive—but they then bind him with chains.
- And then—**trial number one**—he gets dragged before the Sanhedrin.
 - It dissolves into such violence that Paul is almost torn apart.
 - That night, forty men vow not to eat or drink until they've killed him.
 - So the Romans have to evacuate him from Jerusalem under armed guard.
- He's moved to Caesarea—where he stands trial three more times.
 - **Trial two**—before Governor Felix.
 - **Trial three**—before Governor Festus.
 - **Trial four**—before King Agrippa.
- The narrative unfolds quickly, but it all takes about two years.
 - During that time, he languishes in prison.
 - Two years of his life have disappeared.
- Eventually, he's shipped to Rome—but on the way, he enters a literal storm.
 - Fourteen days lost at sea.
 - The ship breaks apart on the rocks of Malta.
 - Paul washes up on the beach—where a viper sinks its fangs into his hand.
- Paul describes what all this was like for him in **2 Cor 11:24**: [Great labors, many imprisonments,] countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.
- That is the storm Paul walked into.

And the question we all start to wonder is: WHY?

- Everyone warned him about it—**disciples, prophets, friends, the Holy Spirit!**
- Why didn't he turn back?
 - The answer is not because he was naturally brave or stupidly stubborn.
 - The answer is that Jesus had given him a mission.
- Look again at **20:24**: I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.
 - He has a course. He has a ministry. He has a mission—to testify to the gospel of grace.
 - A mission given to him by Jesus—and he is determined to complete it.

- And indeed—throughout the storm—he did it.
 - Before the **Sanhedrin**—he preached.
 - Before **Felix**—he preached.
 - Before **Festus**—he preached.
 - Before **King Agrippa**—he preached.
- In every circumstance and at every opportunity, he did indeed **testify to the gospel of grace**.
 - The storm didn't silence him.
 - It became the place where he fulfilled his mission.

Which raises another question in our minds: **HOW?**

- When we feel the weight of all he went through, where did he get the power to do it?
- It's a remarkable combination:
 - Strong enough not to break.
 - Gentle enough to speak grace.
- How does someone live like that in the middle of the storm?
 - The answer isn't raw determination.
 - The answer isn't gritted teeth.
 - The answer actually has nothing to do with Paul's own strength.
 - The answer is he looked to Jesus.
- Another man:
 - Who walked into the storm with eyes wide open.
 - Who knew exactly what was coming.
 - Whose friends begged him not to go.
 - Who said *not my will but yours be done*.
 - Strong enough not to break, and gentle enough to show grace.
 - Who walked, willingly, into the storm—the cross that saves us all.
- Whatever storm Paul walked into, he knew Jesus had walked into a deeper one—**for him**.
 - And because Jesus came out the other side, Paul knew he would too.
 - That's why he didn't even count his life as precious—death was just the final storm through which he would enter eternal life.
- And this gospel... Paul couldn't get over it.
 - He had to run towards the One who had already come running **for him**.
 - He had to enter the storm for the One who entered the ultimate storm **for him**.
 - It wasn't raw determination, gritted teeth, his own strength.
 - He was compelled by the love of Christ.
- A heart loved like that—empowered by the Spirit—can walk into anything.

[Transition]: And here's the thing, dear ones: **The Jesus Paul had—we have as well.**

- Jesus walked to the cross for Paul—and for you.
- The love that fueled Paul's heart—is yours.
- In Jesus, we can make it through the storm.

[CONSEQUENCE]

- Has Jesus given you a mission that feels like a storm?
 - You're in a **relationship** that's not what you hoped it would be.
 - A marriage that's harder than you imagined. A family member who's become estranged.
 - You've prayed about it. You've tried. You're tired.
Don't give up—move into the storm.
 - Love as you've been loved—and keep going.
 - You're raising **kids** or caring for **aging parents**.
 - It's been years. It will be years more.
 - You don't see much progress. No one thanks you.
 - There are days when you wonder if any of it matters.
Don't give up—move into the storm.
 - You are deeply loved by Jesus—and you can keep going.
 - You walk into a **classroom**, a **workplace**, or a **culture** where you have no idea how to share about Jesus.
 - Some think you're naïve. Some think you're intolerant. Others confuse your faith with a set of political beliefs.
 - You don't think they care. You're not sure they ever will.
Don't give up—move into the storm.
 - Trust that the One who changed you can change anyone—and keep going.
- And all of us have a mission, and every mission has its storms.
 - A loss it's hard to get past.
 - A temptation it's hard to let go.
 - Battles with our finances, our bodies, or our mental health.
 - Some in our church today are even facing the final storm of death.
 - The One who walked into the storm for you is walking with you.
 - And he will take you to the other side.
Don't give up—move into the storm.

[THE CLOSE]

- What does that look like in your life just now?
 - Marriage. Kids. Parents. Witness.
 - Maybe a conversation. A commitment. A risk.
- This week—Don't run from it. Move into it.
**The storm in front of you is not the end of the story.
Jesus will take us to the other side.**

RESOURCES

This list includes some of the resources used to prepare this sermon series. Check them out if you want to dig a little deeper.

- John Calvin, *Commentary Upon the Acts of the Apostles*.
- Ray Cortese, *The Mission: Clarified, Mobilized, Empowered*.
- Dennis E. Johnson, *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption*.
- Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Acts*.
- Alan Thompson, *Acts: A Commentary*.
- N. T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone—Part 1 and Part 2*.