

Clinging to the Promises of God

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: God calls on His people to trust His promises without wavering and to call on others to trust in them as well.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: Acts 27–28

How likely are you to trust people in general?



I Don't Trust People

I Trust People Completely

How likely are you to trust God in the varying circumstances of your life?



I Don't Trust God

I Trust God Completely

Group Time

Point 1: Trust in God and boldly proclaim His truth (Acts 27:21-24).

²¹ Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul then stood up among them and said, “You men should have followed my advice not to sail from Crete and sustain this damage and loss. ²² Now I urge you to take courage, because there will be no loss of any of your lives, but only of the ship. ²³ For last night an angel of the God I belong to and serve stood by me ²⁴ and said, ‘Don’t be afraid, Paul. It is necessary for you to appear before Caesar. And indeed, God has graciously given you all those who are sailing with you.’

Paul finally was on his way to Rome after two years in Roman custody. He was put on a ship along with other prisoners and ferried from Caesarea to Crete and then into a storm (27:1-20). Earlier, Paul had shared his spiritual insight and warned the centurion in charge not to sail from Crete, but he was ignored. Now the storm was beating on the ship and the travelers’ hopes for survival. So Paul reminded everyone of his advice, not as an “I told you so” moment but so the people on-board would now listen to him.



Why should we consistently speak the truth, even though people won’t always listen?

Although Paul had shared the message from God, the people on-board still had to make the decision to believe Paul and to act accordingly. Likewise, we all must make the decision to believe God and to act on our faith. Paul was certain of what God had promised through the angel, and he encouraged everyone to take courage with him in the midst of the storm around them. Because he believed in God, he boldly declared God’s truth. Proper actions are dependent upon true beliefs.



How do our beliefs impact our evangelism?

Point 2: Encourage others to trust in God (Acts 27:30-38).

³⁰ Some sailors tried to escape from the ship; they had let down the skiff into the sea, pretending that they were going to put out anchors from the bow. ³¹ Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.”

³² Then the soldiers cut the ropes holding the skiff and let it drop away.

³³ When it was about daylight, Paul urged them all to take food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day that you have been waiting and going without food, having eaten nothing. ³⁴ So I urge you to take some food. For this is for your survival, since none of you will lose a hair from your head.” ³⁵ After he said these things and had taken some bread, he gave thanks to God in the presence of all of them, and after he broke it, he began to eat. ³⁶ They all were encouraged and took food themselves. ³⁷ In all there were 276 of us on the ship. ³⁸ When they had eaten enough, they began to lighten the ship by throwing the grain overboard into the sea.

Some of the crew were about to abandon ship. They had lost all hope. Most likely these men weren't worshipers of the one true God and instead prayed to other gods for rescue (27:29). But in this moment of crisis, their gods and their faith failed them. No rescue came, and they chose to flee. Yet God remained faithful to His promise.

Paul, a prisoner and passenger on his way to Rome, transcended his position on the ship and became a fearless leader and beacon of hope for everyone on-board. He intervened as the sailors looked for a way to escape, and the centurion listened to his warning this time. He also encouraged everyone to keep their strength up by taking some food. Why should the 275 other men on-board the ship listen to Paul, a political prisoner? Because of his confidence in God. Paul's faith was evident to all who encountered Him, and when all the other people had lost their faith, Paul was able to point them to his God.



Voices from Church History

“Little know we what sorrow may be upon the sea at this moment ... God help you, poor, drenched and wearied ones! My prayer goes up to the great Lord of sea and land, that he will make the storm a calm, and bring you to your desired haven! ... This is not our rest, and the restless billows tell us so. There is a land where there is no more sea—our faces are steadfastly set towards it; we are going to the place of which the Lord hath spoken. Till then, we cast our sorrows on the Lord, who trod the sea of old, and who maketh a way for his people through the depths thereof.”¹

—Charles Spurgeon
(1834-1892)



What are some ways believers can encourage unbelievers to trust in God?

Point 3: Recognize the fulfillment of what God has promised (Acts 27:39-44).

³⁹ When daylight came, they did not recognize the land but sighted a bay with a beach. They planned to run the ship ashore if they could. ⁴⁰ After cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and headed for the beach. ⁴¹ But they struck a sandbar and ran the ship aground. The bow jammed fast and remained immovable, while the stern began to break up by the pounding of the waves.” ⁴² The soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners so that no one could swim away and escape. ⁴³ But the centurion kept them from carrying out their plan because he wanted to save Paul, and so he ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. ⁴⁴ The rest were to follow, some on planks and some on debris from the ship. In this way, everyone safely reached the shore.

The ship struck land, but Paul and the people were not out of the waves yet. Should they survive to the shore, the soldiers did not want to lose their lives on account of losing prisoners, so they planned to kill them. Still some distance from the beach, some of the passengers could not swim and would never make it there on their own. God’s promise seemed to be coming apart at the seams, but God remained in control of the circumstances and He fulfilled His promise—everyone reached the shore alive.

God’s Plan and Human Action: God’s _____ over all of life encompasses the free actions of human beings. In ways we are unable to comprehend fully, the Lord’s plan goes forward through the _____ of human beings as moral agents. Knowing that God is working _____ things for the good of those who love Him, we trust in His promise to fulfill His plan, even when we do not understand our present circumstances.

God’s promise to Paul and subsequent encouragement to all the people on the boat involved the promise of survival. But this declaration from God did not include all the frightening details everyone would have to endure: the storm, being lost, and a shipwreck. We are not promised ease in this life, but we are promised that God will be with us and will work all these things together for good (Matt. 28:20; Rom. 8:28).



How have you seen God work things together for good in your life?

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Acts 27:1-26

There's nothing more humbling than being on a boat in the middle of a large body of water. You come to realize the level of faith you have in that boat to keep you safe. It's convicting to grasp how often we can place our trust in something that is made by human hands and yet how hard it is to trust God during our most challenging and difficult times.

Notice how Paul stayed in regular communication with God by praying during his time in the storm. What a great lesson this is for us to know we can remain in regular dialogue with God before, during, and after the storms of life come.

God spoke to Paul in the midst of the storm, and those words filled Paul with hope and courage. Sometimes it takes a storm in life for us to divert our attention off of the things that distract us from God so we can focus on Him and hear Him more clearly.



How has God comforted you with His Word in the midst of the storms in your life?

Day 2: Read Acts 27:27-38

Food is a necessary part of life. God has wired our bodies to be dependent on things outside of ourselves for survival. We need air, water, food, clothing, and shelter. No matter how much money we have, the great equalizer of the entire human race is we cannot keep ourselves alive without being dependent on the items just mentioned. Yet because of our fallen nature, often we stress over these very things to survive.

Jesus actually provided us with the cure for anxiety in Matthew 6:25-34. In this passage, Jesus reminded His followers that God will provide the necessities for life because He is a good God. He cares for all of His creation but takes special care of those who bear His image (Gen. 1:26-27). Sometimes we need to remind people to take time to eat and enjoy life. At the same time, we need to challenge them to give thanks to God, who, out of His benevolent care for His creation, has provided them with what they need to live. This is how we are to redirect our energy away from worrying about things and instead apply our energy toward pursuing God's kingdom.



In what ways can you use your energy to pursue God's kingdom today?

Day 3: Read Acts 27:39-44

It's unusual to consider a shipwreck as evidence of God's being in control. This is a truth we discover in this passage nonetheless. God's promise was kept; no life on the ship was lost. Some might view the shipwreck as an accident, but under closer examination of this passage, it was actually God's way of providing everyone a safe journey.

Perhaps there have been times in your life when you thought an accident, breakup, job termination, or other "shipwrecks" of life were bad, but they actually turned out highlighting God's care and concern for you or someone you love. When my wife, for instance, went to the doctor's office because of what we thought was an allergy infection, the doctor noticed something from her X-ray that prompted him to refer her to a specialist. After running a series of tests, the specialist informed my wife she had multiple sclerosis. In God's grace, we were able to have an early diagnosis so treatment could begin quickly, and at the same time, my wife has been able to minister to so many other people who also have this same disease. Praise God!



As you look over the story of your life, how have "shipwrecks" shown God's goodness in your life?

Day 4: Read Acts 28:1-10

“How can things possibly get worse?” Have you ever asked that question? Just think about Paul’s situation: He was shipwrecked on an island, and after starting a fire to keep everyone in the group warm, he was bitten by a snake. With God being in control, though, this snake bite actually set up a miracle where God protected Paul from the snake’s venom in view of the people of Malta.

We must take notice of how God regularly provided Paul with opportunities to make Jesus known and with evidence that He was involved in Paul’s life. Knowing God is always with us should help us lead lives of contentment. Hebrews 13:5 states, “Keep your life free from the love of money. Be satisfied with what you have, for he himself has said, I will never leave you or abandon you.” Whereas a double negative in English negates the intent of a statement, this verse contains five negatives in its Greek construction, which conveys the absolute nature of God’s promise never to leave any of His children.



What will you attempt to do for God since you know He will never leave you?

Day 5: Read Acts 28:11-31

God’s promise was fulfilled, and Paul finally arrived in Rome. It’s good for us to take notice that at the end of the Book of Acts, we see that the gospel has moved from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and beyond. Now that Paul has entered Rome, we see the gospel is now in the outermost parts of the earth, the heart of the Gentile world. This is a partial fulfillment of Acts 1:8.

As soon as Paul arrived in Rome, he began his gospel ministry (28:17-20). Paul reached out to his fellow Jews first, as was his normal practice. He then reached out to the Gentiles (28:28-31). While Paul spent two years in Rome, God used him to write what are known as the “Prison Epistles”: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

One practice we can learn from Paul: No matter where he found himself, he was going to make Jesus known. May we too follow this example.



How can you follow the example of Paul in your life?

