

# Avoiding the Storms of Life

by Warren Wiersbe

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*The sermon emphasizes that storms of life cannot harm the child of God and that God's presence and provision are available even in the midst of darkness and chaos.*

**Duration:** 37:39

**Scripture:** Isaiah 28:16, Matthew 6:33, Acts 27:25, Acts 27:44, Romans 9:6

**Topics:** "Trials"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the story of Paul and his companions encountering a storm while on a ship. The speaker highlights different reactions to the storm, such as drifting and working hard without God's help. Despite their efforts, everything they did ultimately failed to save them. The speaker emphasizes that storms cannot harm the child of God, even if they may lose material possessions. The sermon encourages listeners to find encouragement and strength in God during the storms of life.

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## Transcript

Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, which means it was past the middle of October when it was dangerous to sail, Paul admonished them and said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with injury and much damage, not only of the cargo and ship, but also of our lives. Nevertheless, the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship more than those things which were spoken by Paul. And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the greater part advised to depart from there also, if by any means they might attain to Phoenicia, and there to winter, which is a haven of Crete, and lieth toward the southwest and the northwest.

And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing from there, they sailed close by Crete. But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind called Euryclidon, a northeaster. And when the ship was caught and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive.

And running under the lee of a certain island, which is called Cauda, we had much work to secure the boat, which when they had hoisted it, they used helps undergirding the ship, and fearing lest they should fall into the quicksand, struck sail, and so were driven. And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship, and the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackle of the ship. And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.

But after being long without food, Paul stood forth in the midst of them and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer, for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of God, whose I am and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul, thou must be brought before Caesar, and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.

Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer, for I believe, God, that it shall be even as it was told me. However, we must be cast upon a certain island. And the rest of the chapter tells how they were cast upon the island of Malta, losing the cargo and the ship, but God spared their lives.

May the Lord help us today to understand some of the storms of life. We are somewhat surprised and puzzled when Luke, the historian who wrote the book of Acts, devotes an entire chapter to a storm and a shipwreck. Now those of you who are nautically inclined might appreciate this.

There are some of us who, like the Hebrew people of the Old Testament, are not too interested in the water. When you read the Old Testament, you discover that the Jewish people were not nautical people, they were land people. Now the Apostle Paul had already been through three shipwrecks before this one.

Of course, Luke, the physician, was a great traveler, but we're kind of puzzled that he should spend a whole chapter talking to us about a shipwreck. Of course, it's a part of his story. He wants to let us know how Paul finally got to Rome, and that's important.

And Luke is a good writer. He's just finished a couple of chapters of politics and preaching and long sermons, and so he balances it with a little bit of dramatic activity. This is good.

And by the way, the experts have tested what Luke wrote about geography and sailing, and they've discovered what we already knew before they started. He was right. All of the studies that have been done on that area and the sailing and Paul's journey have verified the Word of God.

Of course, we know that this is always the case. I think one reason why Luke devotes all this time to a journey and a shipwreck is this. You and I are accustomed to speak of life as a journey.

We talk about the journey of life. We're pilgrims and strangers making this journey, the voyage of life. Tennyson, in *Memoriam*, talks about the voyage of life.

Crossing the Bar is one of his well-known pieces of poetry. He talks about setting sail and going out into eternity. Well, we're on the voyage of life, the journey of life.

John Bunyan caught this idea of a journey in *Pilgrim's Progress*. Homer caught this idea in the *Odyssey*. Melville caught it in *Moby-Dick*.

It's a part of our tradition. We often say, well, he sure made shipwreck of that. Or, boy, you better sink or swim.

So it's a part of our lives. We think of life as a voyage, and we talk about going through the storms of life. How many people have come to me and said, Pastor, pray for me.

Our family is really going through a storm. And when you read this chapter, you almost get seasick when you read about going up and down. Can't you just see these huge waves taking this little boat up and down? And life is sometimes like this.

We are up and then we're down. And there's darkness. And we get out our telescope, and we look for the stars, and we can't find them.

And it seems like everything's going to fall apart. This little boat that we're traveling in is so fragile. And I suppose somebody listening to me right now says, Pastor, when you read that scripture, you were describing my life, I'm going through a storm.

I think Luke must have had this in mind, because he wants us to learn from this chapter what it means to go through the storms of life. Now, let me hurriedly say to you that this is not an allegory. He's not saying that the church is a boat.

If that's the case, at the end of the story, the whole thing has fallen to pieces. All you have left are the church boards. And I don't think that's what Luke's talking about at all.

He's not saying that life is a boat. He's just simply painting a picture for us. He's saying now, there was a destination, Rome, and there was the beginning of this voyage, Caesarea, and along the way came this storm.

And Luke says, I want to talk to you about the storms of life. He says, I want to give to you some encouragements for the storms of life. When I read the newspapers and listen to the news, I'm sometimes tempted to believe that our world today is just like this boat, up and down, and they're doing everything they can to hold it together.

They ran cables around this boat to hold it together. And my, many of the things that we thought were so secure are falling apart. So let's learn from Luke some encouragements to help us in the storms of life.

The first one, I think you picked up while I was reading the scripture, storms cannot harm the child of God. They may lose the boat, they may lose the cargo, they may throw the furniture over, but there is Paul and there is Aristarchus, his companion from Thessalonica, and there is Dr. Luke. And because of them, the others were saved.

Storms cannot harm the child of God. Now storms come for one of three reasons. This is important.

There are some storms that we cause ourselves. Ah, there's not a person here today, there's not a person listening to me who can't say, Pastor, I know what you're talking about. There are storms that I brought on myself.

Like Jonah. God said, Jonah, I want you to rise up and go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it. And Jonah said, I think you've got the wrong man.

I'm resigning. And he took off for Tarshish. And a storm came along.

You know, the storms that come when you and I disobey God are terrible storms. And not only are we being threatened, but those whom we love are being threatened. There are some storms that we cause ourselves.

Paul didn't cause this storm. There are some storms that God causes. One day, Jesus said to his disciples, get in the boat and get going.

I'll see you on the other side. And they began to row and a storm swept down upon the Sea of Galilee. And they were rowing and getting nowhere.

And the winds were contrary to them. Jesus knew that storm was coming. He deliberately sent his disciples into that storm to discipline them and to teach them.

Then he came walking out in the water and he stilled the storm. There are storms that we cause ourselves by disobedience. And there are storms that God causes for discipline.

But the most difficult storms of life to go through are the storms that other people cause. And we are on board with them. There are parents just now who are going through storms caused by their children.

And there are children going through storms caused by their parents. There are businessmen going through storms caused by some of their associates. There are church members going through storms caused by some of their friends.

I'm sorry that this is true, but it's true. Sometimes we go through storms that other people cause. And that's what Paul was going through.

You see, God had told them boldly, don't leave. Stay here in the fair havens. In fact, in the previous verses, which we did not read publicly, God had indicated things aren't going right.

You better be careful. Up in verse 4, the winds were contrary. In verse 7, they sailed slowly.

In verse 8, they arrived with much difficulty. And Paul got up and said, I perceive. He didn't say I had a revelation from heaven.

He said, I perceive my radar has been working and I perceive that we are heading for trouble. Let's stay here in the fair havens. Now, we today who are accustomed to traveling any place we want to go to at any time of the year are puzzled at this, but you see, they couldn't sail whenever they wanted to.

From October through November, the sailing season was tapering off and getting dangerous. And from the middle of November until February, you didn't dare go out. And Paul had been on board ship enough to know something about nautical regulations and principles.

This raises the interesting question, why in the world would this centurion who was in charge of the ship decide to leave the fair havens and try to head 40 miles for a place called Phoenix and there to winter? They have to sit there for several months. Why did they decide to leave? For the same reasons that people today decide to disobey God. God said, don't go stay here.

God warned them. You know, people don't want to believe God's word. I'm noticing here in verse nine, they got impatient.

Now, when much time was spent, you know, when people get impatient, they find themselves rushing ahead of God's will and they get into a storm, impatient to get married, impatient to leave school, impatient to do this or that. And instead of waiting on God, my Bible says, he that believeth shall not make haste. And one of the evidences of unbelief is impatience.

They got impatient and they headed right into a storm. I noticed in verse 11 that they went by the expert advice, the centurion who probably knew very little about sailing, got the pilot and the captain of the ship.

He said, now you men are the experts.

Yes, we are. You've been sailing a long time. Yes, we have.

We understand the sea. What do you think we should do? We think we ought to leave. I have counseled with married couples who have gone to see some of the experts.

All of the experts aren't like this. Thank God. And they said, pastor, you know what that counselor told us to do? He told us each to get a girlfriend or a boyfriend.

This will liven up your marriage. It sure will. That's what the experts say.

The expert looks at the Christian and says, well, you know, your halo is too tight. That's the whole problem. If you just get that halo a little looser, you'd, you'd have a happier home.

The experts, you know, there are times when the experts think they're right and the word of God says they're wrong. So they were impatient and they listened to the experts. By that, I do not mean we don't go for expert counsel in many areas.

When my automobile is not functioning, I take it to a mechanic. When my body is not functioning, I take it to a doctor. But above and beyond what the experts may know is the revelation of the because the haven was not commodious to winter and wasn't too comfortable.

I've had, I've had young ladies say to me, well, pastor, you know, things are so uncomfortable at home. I'm going to get married. You don't get married to leave home.

If you do, my friend, you take that problem right with you. Things are so uncomfortable in my office. I'm going to leave.

You leave when God tells you to leave. A Christian does not move from, he moves to. And they just weren't comfortable there.

Watch out when you get impatient and uncomfortable, you'll do some dumb thing. I noticed also in verse 12 that they took a vote. Now that's always the way to find out what to do.

Take a vote. There were 276 people on board this huge ship. This ship was a grain ship.

And my investigation lets me know that it was probably 140 or 150 feet long and about 36 to 40 feet wide. It's a big ship. It wasn't some little rowboat.

276 people were on that ship. Many of them were prisoners being taken to Rome to be thrown to the lions. And the centurion said, look, the best way to determine things is take a vote.

How many of you feel we should leave in 272 hands went up. How many of you think we should stay in three hands went up Luke and Aristarchus and Paul and the centurion said, well, it's obvious that the majority rules. Have you ever read your Bible and watched for the majority? The majority said, we cannot conquer the land of Cain.

And let's go back to Egypt. And the majority was wrong. The majority said, Oh, give us a King.

And the majority was wrong. The majority said, we have no King, but Caesar, give us Barabbas. And the majority was wrong.

And the majority said, let's get out of this little old cubby hole of a Harbor and get to a good place with at least some entertainment. And the majority was wrong. You know, I know some people who, when they're trying to make a decision, will run from person to person and person to person asking what they think they're hoping to rack up enough votes to tell them to do what they want to do anyway.

And then they come to the pastor and say, Oh, I'm in such a mess. I wonder how this happened. I'll tell you how it happened.

And you know how it happened. You get impatient, you go after expert advice, you get uncomfortable, you take a majority vote. But verse 13 is the turning point.

At that point, they'd finished counting the ballots and the early returns were coming in. At that point, the south wind began to blow softly and everybody turned and looked at Luke and Aristarchus and Paul and said, uh-huh, we told you so. Look, the gods have favored us with just the wind that we need.

Watch out when that south wind is blowing softly. Just watch out because that south wind turned into a stormy wind. Oh, I've had folks say to me, oh, pastor, this opportunity came along just at the right time.

Are you sure it's an opportunity to serve God? So they went by the circumstances and when circumstances contradict the word of God, you better go by the word of God. It didn't take long for that south wind to become a stormy wind and the result was everything was lost except their lives. Now what I'm saying is this, in the midst of all of this, God protected his people.

It wasn't Paul's fault that they left the port. Paul and Aristarchus and Luke prayed and God looked down and he said to his angels, keep your eyes on that ship down there. I've only got three of my children down there, but where one of my children is, I want you to watch them.

By the way, let me say a word to you unsaved people who are forever criticizing the saints. The only thing that keeps the ship together today is because God's people are here. God spared Sodom and Gomorrah until Lot got out.

And God is sparing this world until we get out and you unsaved people who criticize the church and laugh at the saints of God. One of these days we'll be gone. You will not be here for you to criticize us or laugh at us, but you'll wish we were back because the only thing that keeps this thing together today is the fact that God's people are here.

And so God's angels with their water wings came down to watch over that boat. Storms cannot harm the child of God. Now there's a second encouragement here.

The storms cannot hide the face of God. That encourages me. The storms cannot hide the face of God.

I read here that it got so dark and so stormy and for many days they couldn't see the sun. Sounds like Chicago in the wintertime, doesn't it? For many days they couldn't see the sun. Now this ship did not have radar.

It didn't even have a compass. They did all of their reckoning by the stars and by the sun. This amazes me.

I have a hard time walking down the sidewalk and not getting lost. I get lost in my automobile sometimes. I don't know where I am.

And yet here is a man, a pilot who is able by watching the stars and the sun to calculate. Ah, but when you can't see the stars and the sun, what do you do? You see, if you're trusting anything other than the Lord, the storm is one day going to blot it out. Somebody says, well, I'm putting my faith in science.

When the storm starts blowing, you can't see the stars. God put them up there, but you can't see them. You can't see the sun.

What are you going to do? They had nothing to guide them. But you see, the storm cannot hide the face of God for God's children. Here was this ship like a little cork bounding up and down.

And it's interesting to see what happens to people when the storm comes. For example, I notice in verse 15 that they drifted. There are some people when the storm comes, they just drift.

I notice in verses 16 through 19 that when the storm comes, some people work as hard as they can without God's help. Now, I'm not criticizing them. They pulled in the spare boat that they had behind them, and they bound up the hull of the ship to keep it from falling apart.

Then they started throwing out the furniture. Ultimately, they threw out the wheat. I don't blame them for doing this.

All I'm saying is everything that they did ultimately failed. The thing that saved their lives was not all of their hard work. It was Paul.

So when the storm comes, there are some who drift. There are some who do all they can without God's help. Verse 29, there are some who wish they wished for the day.

I've met people like this. I've met them in hospitals where they're lying there wishing. Years ago, there was a silly popular song that said, wishing will make it so.

I hope that people have discovered it doesn't work. Some people drift, and some people work without God, and some people wish, and some people try to escape. In verses 30 through 32, Paul was watching, and some of the people tried to get out.

They were lowering the boat, and Paul said, if they leave this ship, we're all done for. And boy, some of those soldiers pulled out their daggers and cut the ropes. There's always somebody who tries to escape.

The boat on which they escape has a different name to it each time. Sometimes it's called alcohol. Sometimes it's called narcotics.

Sometimes it's called sex. Sometimes it's called entertainment. They're looking for some escape out of the storm.

Paul's not doing that. Paul, I just see Paul as he walks on the deck of that ship, looking up through the storm, quoting to himself some of the Psalms. The voice of the Lord is upon the waters.

The voice of the Lord is powerful. Oh, some of those great Psalms where God moves in like a storm. And he and Aristarchus and Luke aren't afraid.

They aren't even seasick, because the storm cannot hide the face of God. One night, an angel showed up. He hadn't even bought a ticket to go on board the ship, but there he was.

And this angel said, Paul, don't be afraid. God's made a promise that you're going to go to Rome and we'll see to it that you get there. Just keep everybody in the ship and everybody who stays in the ship.

They'll be saved and they won't die. And so Paul gets up and he says, you know, don't you love a fellow like this? I told you so. I'm glad he said that.

Now, let me tell you why he said it, not because he was proud. Paul never stood up and said, I told you so. Paul said, you know, a few weeks ago I told you that this was going to happen and it happened, which means you can trust me.

Now I've got someone, I've got another message for you. My first message was a message of warning, but this message is a message of hope. God spoke to me in all of the storm, in all of the darkness.

God spoke to me and he said, Paul, don't be afraid. And Paul said to this entire bunch of people, he and Luke and Aristarchus facing 273 frightened, wet, hungry people, Paul said, be of good cheer because I believe God. Oh, you believe the wind and you believe the captain and you believe the navigator and you believe your own feelings, but I believe God and I believe His Word is going to be fulfilled because the storm cannot hide the face of God.

Oh, you've gone through the storm. I've gone through the storm. The wind is blowing.

It seems like the boat is sinking and then out of the whole thing you just see the face of God and God says, my child, don't be afraid. It's the same thing that happened to those disciples. They were rowing and they were afraid and then Jesus just came walking to them.

The very storm that they were afraid of brought Jesus to them. He said, now don't be afraid. Be of good cheer.

It is I. And he saw them through. The storm cannot harm the child of God. The storm cannot hide the face of God.

And there's a third encouragement Luke gives to us. I'm so glad he wrote this chapter. The storm cannot hinder the will of God.

This is one of the most beautiful illustrations of human responsibility and divine sovereignty anywhere in the Bible. Young theologians come to me and they say, pastor, how do you reconcile human responsibility and divine sovereignty? You know, God says, I have a plan. I have a will.

And I say, yeah, but I have a will. How do you reconcile that? And I always answer them with the words of Spurgeon. When they came to Spurgeon and said, Mr. Spurgeon, how do you reconcile human responsibility and divine sovereignty? He smiled and said, I never try to reconcile friends.

This is true. You see, here is a boat and that boat was important because on that boat was Ephesians and Philippians and Colossians. Paul was going to Rome and Luke was on that boat.

And on that boat was the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts and Aristarchus was on that boat. He had signed himself onto the boat as Paul's slave. I wonder if any of us would sign ourselves onto a boat as a

slave to help some missionary.

And God said that boat is going to have trouble between here and there, but my people are going to get to Rome. You know what he's saying to me? He's saying, I know where you started. I started you and I know where you're going to end up.

I've got that planned. In between time, you're going to pull some blunders. You're going to go on some detours.

You're going to have some storms, but I want you to know something. I am going to fulfill my purpose. Now, if you obey me, you won't be the loser.

If you disobey me, you will be the loser, but you're going to get where I've planned for you to get. You see, where God does not rule, he overrules. That encourages me.

People come to me and say, oh, so-and-so is out of the will of God. I said, let's pray for them. Let's pray for them.

God can overrule. Now they're going to lose. Poor, they lost their cargo.

They lost the ship. They almost lost their lives. This is kind of a water version of first Corinthians three, which is fire saved as by fire.

They were saved as by water. They lost everything, but they saved their lives. You know, there's some Christians who in the voyage of life have disobeyed God and they've gotten into storms because of their disobedience and they've lost the cargo and they've lost the ship, but God spared their lives.

And one day they're going to stand before the Lord. They'll be saved, but they've lost. They've lost their reward.

You see, God's will is going to be effected in this world. I cannot believe that almighty God is pacing the floor up in heaven and saying, oh, what can I do about the oil crisis? Oh, what in the world can I do about Cambodia? Oh, what can be? God is not pacing the floor. In the year that King Isaiah died, said the prophet Isaiah, I saw also the Lord high and lifted up and his train filled the temple.

Everything in the nation was falling apart. The King had died, but God was just sitting very calmly on his throne. He wasn't afraid.

The storms cannot hinder the will of God. You and I may, by our disobedience, lose the blessing of God, but the storm is not going to hinder the will of God. He's going to accomplish his purposes.

Now there's an interesting thing. Luke and Paul were very good friends. Paul had written a letter to the church at Rome and he made an interesting statement in Romans chapter nine.

I want you to turn there. Romans chapter nine and verse six. He was talking about the sovereignty of God.

Romans chapter nine and verse six. He's talking about the fact that the nation of Israel had rejected God's plan. Did this mean that God's plan wouldn't be fulfilled? Look at Romans nine, six, not as though the word of God hath taken no effect.

That little verb taken no effect is a Greek word that means a ship going off of course. Luke uses that word three times in Acts 27. I can just see Luke and Paul talking there in the storm and Luke is saying, you remember when you wrote Romans? Yes.

Remember that verse you wrote there? Not as though the word of God hath gone off of its course. Paul said, that's right. Luke said, you know, this ship has gone off course.

We have been drifting off course now for weeks. Paul said, don't worry about it. Luke God's word is not going to go off course.

And it doesn't. The storm cannot hinder the will of God. And if I'm going through the storm and my little bark is going up and down and the winds of doctrine and the winds are trying to blow me off course, God's word is going to be fulfilled.

You see, God had a purpose for Paul. He said to Paul weeks before he said, as thou hast borne witness of me in Jerusalem, thou must bear witness of me in Rome. I'm just glad God knows where he wants me and when he wants me there and all the storms that hell can create cannot keep God's will from being fulfilled.

But God had another purpose in mind and this just blesses my heart. On board that ship were hundreds of Roman prisoners. They were being taken to Rome for the gladiator shows.

They were going to be used to entertain the populace to keep them happy. They were going to be killed. And if Paul had not been on board that ship, those men would never have found out how to die.

What did Paul do on board that ship? Sit in a corner and say prayers? No. He'd find a couple of prisoners who had just finished bailing for all they were worth. He'd put his arms around them and say, man, I want to tell you about Jesus.

You're going through a storm and we're going to get through this storm, but you're going to go to Rome and I want to tell you how to die. And there on board that ship, Paul would lead these men to faith in Jesus Christ. I don't doubt, knowing Paul as I think I do, I don't doubt that he led scores of them to faith in Christ.

I suppose when that voyage started, those prisoners thought Paul was kind of a screwball. They'd be over cursing, cursing the emperor. They'd see Paul and Aristarchus and Luke and all those guys are Christians.

They believe in a God who died and rose again. That's kind of screwy, isn't it? Strange. But as that storm progressed, Joseph Parker says it so beautifully, when the voyage began, Paul was a prisoner.

When it ended, he was the captain. But as that voyage progressed, they came to Paul and said, look, what is it that keeps you like you are? You're not afraid. He said, I'll tell you what it is.

It's Jesus. One day I met Jesus. He died for me and he died for you.

And if you trust him as your savior, you don't have to be afraid. And they may take you and herd you into the coliseum and you may be killed by the blow of some hungry lion. Makes no difference.

You'll wake up in glory. And Paul led these people one by one to faith in Jesus Christ. That's what I'd like to do for you.

You're going through the storms of life. If you're not saved, you're headed for death. You're headed for death.

Just as these prisoners were headed for death, you're headed for death. Oh, I'd love to see you come and give your heart to Jesus Christ. Then come what may, you wake up in glory.

The storms of life, they're going to come. They're going to come. But the storms cannot harm the child of God.

The storms cannot hide the face of God. The storms cannot hinder the will of God. When you know Jesus Christ is your savior.

Let's pray. We come, our Father, praying for any who are destined for death, who have never trusted the Savior, that they might come and trust Him. We pray for any of your people going through the storm, that they'll realize you're with them.

Lord, help us not to cause the storm by our own unbelief and disobedience. We ask your blessing now as we open the invitation and pray that there might be many who will come to trust the Savior. For we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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