

“BECAUSE LIVES ARE AT RISK...”

Acts 27:20-26

INTRODUCTION

1. So, why do we do all this as a church? There is only one answer to that question: We believe that lives are at stake. We believe that eternity hangs in the balance for every human being on the face of this earth. And, we believe that God has entrusted our church with a rescue mission that deserves our undivided loyalty and energy.

2. If you follow the news, you've seen the reports about the oil platform that exploded in the Gulf of Mexico sending millions of barrels of oil into the water. You've probably watched the videos of wildlife struggling to survive after they've been coated in oil. You might have heard reports of how the fishing industry has been radically affected off the coast of Louisiana because of this spill.

Perhaps you've heard executives from British Petroleum and from the federal government talking about how to address this problem.

You see, when the problem is big enough, it demands attention. As a church, we believe that people in this world face a huge problem: The problem is where they will spend eternity. Every day, you and I rub shoulders with people whose lives are at stake...where eternity hangs in the balance. Because that's true, I want to turn our attention to some principles that will help us know how to respond when lives are at stake. If you have a Bible with you, I encourage you to turn with me to the 27th chapter of the Book of Acts.

As we come to Acts 27, we discover that the Apostle Paul was a prisoner on a ship with 275 other people. The ship was caught in a hurricane off the coast of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea.

Because of the storm, the story tells us that all 276 people were in jeopardy! And from this story, I want to develop five lessons you and I can learn when we realize that the lives of people around us are at stake, not just today, but for all eternity. First of all...

1. **WHEN LIVES ARE AT STAKE, HOPE REIGNS SUPREME!**

Look at these words in verse 20:

“When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved” (Acts 27:20).

Have you ever been on the water when a storm hits? It can be terrifying! In fact, it's not hard to imagine why Paul's companions said, *“We finally gave up all hope of being saved.”*

When you can't see land, and all you can see is the storm, it's easy to lose hope.

Eg. Several years ago, a woman named, Florence Chadwick, attempted to become the first woman to swim the English Channel both ways. She didn't quite make it on her first attempt. It wasn't the cold water. It wasn't the sharks. It wasn't the 15 hour swim. It was the fact that fog rolled in and she couldn't see the coastline. She quit a half a mile from the goal.

When she got out of the water she said, *“I’m not trying to make an excuse, but I feel like if the fog hadn’t been there, and I could have seen the land, I would have made it.”*

Later she tried again. The fog rolled in, but this time she knew that the coastline was there and she completed the journey. In fact, she did it two hours faster than anybody else had ever done it.

The truth is, people in this world live in a fog. Many feel like they’ve lost hope!

Years ago, Napoleon said: *“Leaders are dealers in hope.”* That’s right! And the mission of the Church of Jesus Christ is to bring hope to the world. It was Martin Luther who said,

“Everything that is done in the world is done by hope.”

I love these words from the writer of Hebrews:

“... We who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure” (Hebrews 6:18b-19a).

Eg. Fifteen years ago, Billy Graham stood on a pulpit in Puerto Rico delivering messages that were heard by as many as 1 billion people at the same time. His words were translated into 116 different languages and broadcast around the world.

Here’s a little of what he said:

“It is time for the church to use technology to make a statement that in the midst of chaos, emptiness, and despair. There is hope in the person of Jesus Christ.”

Do you realize, as a church, we’re all about bringing hope to hopeless situations.

Eg. A few weeks ago, people from Grace participated in the Cleveland Marathon. Members of “Team Hope” ran in order to raise money for our orphan homes in Southeast Asia. Do you know why they did that? It was all about bringing hope to children who have no hope.

When lives are at stake, hope reigns supreme. Furthermore, in this story we discover that...

2. WHEN LIVES ARE AT STAKE, A VOICE OF AUTHORITY IS RESPECTED.

Let’s read on in this story.

“After the men had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: ‘Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss’” (Acts 27:21)

What in the world was Paul talking about? If you look back to the end of verse 9, you will discover what Paul had in mind.

“So Paul warned them, ‘Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also.’”

But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship. Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there” (Acts 27:9-12a).

In other words, when the hurricane hit, Paul spoke to the sailors of this ship whom he had warned about the storm and said, *“You didn’t have to do this.”* He spoke with authority because lives were at stake... *“I warned you!”*

You know, Jesus has done the same thing with us. He has spoken with authority! In fact, we read these words in Matthew 28:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations....”
(Matthew 28:18-19a).

In Matthew 24:35 Jesus said it like this:

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Matthew 24:35).

Do you know that for 70 years our church has been responding to the voice of authority of the One who said, *“Go and make disciples of all nations”?*

Do you realize the heart of our church has been to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with people around the globe for seven decades?

Eg. If you’ve had a chance to look at our proposed church budget for the coming year, you’ll discover that we have earmarked almost \$500,000 directly to missions support in the next twelve months. That means about \$1

out of every \$6 that’s given to the church budget goes directly to supporting efforts to make disciples around the world in countries like Cambodia, Brazil, the Czech Republic, France, Viet Nam and Turkey, as well as the United States.

But, that doesn’t tell the whole story. That doesn’t include money we spend locally to touch the lives of internationals. That doesn’t include the efforts to share hope with people in desperate economic conditions through a ministry called, Sowing Hope. That doesn’t include all of our efforts to touch the lives of children through Upward Basketball and Vacation Bible School. That doesn’t include money for student mission trips. That doesn’t include the work of our pastors... Pastor of Cross-Cultural Ministries, Associate Pastor of outreach, etc, etc!

I encourage you to ask the missionaries we support why they have moved their families to other parts of the world. Do you know the answer they’ll give you? It’s right here... on the authority of Jesus Himself. He said, *“Go and make disciples of all the nations...”*

If you have the opportunity, ask Russ and Michelle Ream why their son, who is a college student, is spending the next ten weeks in Argentina.

While many students spend the summer looking for the best paying job they can find, or relaxing with their friends after a busy year, Zach has traveled thousands of miles to be a part of a ministry that is making disciples on the opposite side of the globe because Jesus said to do that. When lives are at stake, a voice of authority is respected. For 70 years, this church has respected the voice of authority that said, *“Go and make disciples of all the nations.”*

There is another lesson from this story...

3. WHEN LIVES ARE AT STAKE, COURAGE IS REQUIRED

On at least two occasions Paul says to his fellow travelers, "*Keep up your courage.*"

Look at verse 22 and then verse 25.

"Now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost. So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as He told me" (Acts 27:22a, 25).

Can you imagine the storm clouds around Paul as he said these words? Imagine the 10, 15, 20 foot waves that crashed across the bow of the ship! No wonder Paul said, "*Keep up your courage.*"

When you're in the middle of a storm, it takes courage to keep going! The same is true for you and me today. We've heard all about the economic uncertainty of the world in which we live. Many have seen their financial assets shrink over the last 18 months.

Eg. I read this week about a group of elite financial leaders who just met in Spain to consider the fate of the Euro and the economic crisis facing the European Union... This is a time of economic uncertainty.

We also live in a day of spiritual pressure where Christians all over the world are being threatened.

Eg. I read the latest update from the *Voice of the Martyrs* about the intense persecution of Christians by Muslims in the country of Nigeria.

One medical doctor, who observed horrible atrocities, said, "*This is the first time in my work at Voice of the Martyrs that the word, 'carnage' comes to mind.*"

We live in a world where there is pressure all around us to surrender the message that Jesus Christ died so that people could experience forgiveness of sins and eternity in heaven. Courage is required more than ever before.

Joshua said it like this to the people of his day.

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9).

Folks, it would be easy for us, in a climate of uncertainty and pressure, to pull back from the work God has entrusted to us. But we must not. Courage is required because lives are at stake in this nation and around the world.

Eg. In just a few days, members of our young adult ministry will travel to the countries of Cambodia and Thailand to minister to children in our orphan homes. All those young adults have raised their own money to go on these trips.

When lives are stake, courage is required. When lives are at stake, a voice of authority is respected. When lives are at stake, hope reigns supreme. And...

4. WHEN LIVES ARE AT STAKE, EVERY LIFE IS RESPECTED

In this story Paul goes on to tell his fellow passengers:

*“...God has graciously given you the lives **of all who sail with you**” (Acts 27:24b).*

In other words, Paul promised that every life on that ship would be spared... from the captain to each prisoner!

Do you understand the principle here? Because it doesn't make any difference whether we're talking about an orphan child in Cambodia, a widow in Thailand, a family in the Central African Republic, a business man in France, a student in Portugal, or a teacher in Brazil. **Every life matters.**

Peter says it like this:

*“The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but **everyone** to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).*

A couple of months ago, four of the men in our church headed to the Central African Republic to unstable areas where courage is required. Do you know why we're doing this? Because lives are at stake!

We could ignore the fact that people in this world are dying because they don't have clean water, but we've chosen to help drill water wells in the heart of Africa. In fact, I want you to listen to this little public service announcement...

Why are we doing this? Because every life is worthy of respect.

Why do we support the ministry of The Pregnancy Care Center of Wayne County through our offerings? Because we believe every human life reflects the dignity of God Himself and is worthy of respect.

Eg. This week, Gary Rogers, our school administrator, told me the story of a little girl who was in his office this year on several occasions. This little girl had misbehaved and needed to see the principal.

But just a few days before the end of school, that little girl stood before Mr. Rogers and sang all four verses of *Amazing Grace* by heart. That little girl's life is being changed because of the loving work of teachers in our school. Why do we have a ministry like Wooster Christian School? Because **every life** is worthy of our respect! When lives are at stake, every life is valuable. But there is one more principle that comes from the story.

5. WHEN LIVES ARE AT STAKE, COST IS RE-CALCULATED!

There is an interesting part of this story that we haven't read yet. As the sailors on board this ship realized what they were up against, the Bible says they threw all the cargo overboard. Look at what it says back in verse 18:

“We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands” (Acts 27:18, 19).

When lives are at stake, the material things we possess don't mean anything! Just ask somebody who has been in a house fire where the family has escaped and they lost all their possessions. The stuff we have doesn't matter when lives are at stake.

Eg. Now, you need to know that we've poured as many resources as possible in the last several years into reaching lost people in this community and around the world. But the ship that is the hub of our operations - this facility - is in need of some repair.

In fact, members of our Facilities Committee have looked diligently at the shape of our building and realized that over the next several years, we're going to have to spend significant funds to repair and refurbish this facility.

But we cannot relinquish the mission God's given to us. We must pay attention to the needs of this facility while we continue the ministries entrusted to us by God. When our missionaries ask for additional support, we must do our part!

Therefore, in the year ahead, you'll hear about the need to add \$275,000 to our budget to replace equipment in this building and to repair the west parking lot. That will cause the budget in our new fiscal year to increase by about 13%. Most of that increase is related to the capital improvement that needs to be done around this place.

The good news is, we already have about \$140,000 of that \$275,000 in cash.

Yet, in addition to our ongoing ministry operations here, we still need to raise about \$140,000 more in cash this year

in order to repair this facility. I trust you'll make this a matter of prayer.

In fact, if you'd like to designate a personal gift or class gift to these projects, you can simply mark your gift, "*People Matter.*"

Many of you have seen a little video I prepared which describes these needs. If you'd like to see that video and you haven't yet, you can go to our church website and type in the keyword, "Budget," and you'll be able to see it.

CONCLUSION

1. The truth is, we can't afford to let up in the mission God has entrusted to us.

Eg. Just a few weeks ago, a young father in our church shared his story with us when he was baptized. Listen to some of the things he said:

"I was encouraged to trust in Jesus Christ to be the leader of my life at Wooster Grace through Student Ministries. I realized that the only way to enter into a perfect heaven with Him is accepting only Him as my personal Savior.

This personal decision has changed my "family tree" forever. I know full well that date in my life has had a direct impact on my family and, God willing, my daughter's family and future generations to come.

I'm still encouraged every time I walk through these doors knowing that this church is going to preach the truth. I have been and will be touched with Christ's

love through friendships, small groups and serving others here at Grace.”

Folks, all around this room are people who have stories like that...people whose lives have been affected because of the ministry of this church. And in many ways, that story has been repeated all around the world. But in order for that to continue in the year that's ahead, we need your commitment and your support. As we close this service, I'm going to invite you to commit yourself to what God has for our church in the year ahead.