Paul's Fourth Journey

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Date: 30 November 2025

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[0:00] Hello and good morning to you and God bless you. So we've got a map up there because we're looking at a sea voyage this morning in the Mediterranean.

It won't be the kind of sea voyage that you've ever heard of before if you've never read this chapter. This sea voyage was quite different from any modern day sea voyage.
This happened in about 50 something AD. And a man named Paul, and we'll have the details in a minute, Paul was the hero of the story.
This is an interesting story, it's a dramatic story, and he was the chief actor. I imagine that this story could have been serialized by the Rome Daily Mail and probably entitled How the Prisoner Took Over the Ship.
And they started from Sidon, no, Caesarea, Jerusalem. We started Jerusalem, it's a bit inland, they got the boat, you can see where they got the boat.
[1:17] And the custom in those days was to hug the coast. Because the boats there, and I just thought just now I should have brought a picture if I could have found one of a galleon in the Roman times.

This was a boat carrying wheat. And they used to hug the coast, so they went, it was pretty safe. They went near Cyprus and then they went up to Mara.
And then they sort of nipped between roads and down to Crittus. And then it started to go wrong. Because they were heading for Rome.
And I can't see them. Rome is, yes, you can just see it up the top there. So they had a long way to go. And after roads, it sort of all went wrong.
Instead of keeping nearer the coast, they sort of got blown south. And then they had a really bad time right out there where it says storms cause ship to lose control.
[2:21] And wander in the sea for two weeks. It sounds a bit like Antarctica, doesn't it? But this was the friendly Mediterranean in a winter storm.

So let's just pray before we start, shall we? And when I prayed, Fred has kindly agreed to come and read Acts chapter 27 and a part of chapter 28.
If you think that's rather long, that was what I was given to speak on. And I couldn't see how we could stop in the middle of such an adventure story. So we're going to read all that.
So thank you, Fred, in a minute when I've prayed. Father God, we thank you for your word. We thank you that every bit is important for teaching us and educating us and drawing us closer to you. And Father, I pray that we may not just think, well, this is a nice church and there's comfortable seats. And I've enjoyed singing and we're going to hear a story and then I'll go home and have lunch.
[3:34] Father, a lot can happen before we go home and have lunch. And Father God, we ask you this morning in the name of Jesus to meet with each one of us. Father, some of us have greater needs than others.

We've come here with needs, with prayers that need answering, with issues in our lives that we want to deal with, Father. But above all, our prayer is that we this morning may see Jesus clearly. Jesus and all his glory and beauty. And feel the love of Jesus and the grace of Jesus as we read the word and as we listen. Come, Lord Jesus, we pray, by your Holy Spirit and minister to us this morning.
We're a needy people and we love you and we need you, Jesus. In your name, amen. Amen. Amen. Thanks very much.
As Anthony's told you, we're in Acts, towards the end of the book of Acts. We're beginning in Acts 27 and we're going through to the end of verse 10 in Acts 28.

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[4:52] As we've already heard in the weeks past, Paul's been waiting in Jerusalem. He's been waiting for two years and now finally he's on his way to Rome.

And as ever, when we're in the Lord's way, it's an adventure. And we're going to get deep into that adventure this morning. Acts 27 verse 1.
When it was decided that we would set sail for Italy, Paul and some of the prisoners, and incidentally, this is Luke speaking, of course. That's the we there.
When we decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some of the other prisoners were handed over to a centurion called Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment.
We boarded a ship from Adramathium about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia. And we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us.
[5:57] And you'll be able to follow that journey on the map that's up out behind me. The next day we landed at Sidon. And Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so that they might provide for his needs.

From there we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us. When we had sailed across the open sea off the coast of Sicilia and Paphilia, we landed at Myra in Lycia.
There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board. We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty arriving off Gnodos.
When the wind did not allow us to hold our course, we sailed to the lee of Crete opposite Salome. We moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a place called Fairhaven near the town of Lycia.
Much time had been lost and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was the Day of Atonement. So Paul warned them, Men, I see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo and to our lives also.
[7:19] But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot of the owner of the ship. Since the harbour was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there.

This was a harbour in Crete, facing both southwest and northwest. When a gentle south wind began to blow, they saw their opportunity, so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete.
Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called a northeaster, swept down from the island. The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind.
So we gave way to it and were driven along. As we passed to the lee of a small island called Coda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure, so the men hoisted it aboard.
Then they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Because they were afraid they would run aground on the sandbars of Syria, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along.
[8:40] We took 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.

When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, they finally gave up all hope of being saved. After they had gone a long time without food, Paul stood before them and said, Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete.
Then you would have spared yourself this damage and loss. But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost.
Only the ship will be destroyed. Last night, an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me and said, Do not be afraid, Paul.
You must stand trial before Caesar, and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you. So keep your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me.
[9:57] Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island. On the 14th night, we were still being driven across the Adriatic Sea, when about midnight the sailors sensed that they were approaching land.

They took soundings and found that the water was 120 feet deep. A short time later, they took soundings again and found that it was 90 feet deep.
Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the

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sea, pretending that they were going to lower some anchors from the bow.
But Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved. So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it drift away.
Just before dawn, Paul urged them all to eat. For the last 14 days, he said, After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all.
[11:29] Then he broke it and began to eat. They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. Altogether, there were 276 of us on board.

When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea. When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could.
Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach.
But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bows struck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf.
The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. But the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life and kept them from carrying out their plan.
[12:38] He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. The rest were to get there on planks or on other pieces of the ship. In this way, everybody reached land safely.

Once safely on shore, they found out that the island was called Malta. The islanders showed us unusual kindness.
They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself to his hand.
When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, this man must be a murderer, for though he escaped from the sea, the goddess Justice has not allowed him to live.
But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects, the people expecting him to swell up or to suddenly fall dead.
[13:41] But after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their mind and said he was a god. There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island.

He welcomed them to his home and showed us generous hospitality for three days. His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery.
Paul went in to see him and after prayer placed his hands on him and healed him. When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured.
They honoured us in many ways and when we were ready to set sail, they furnished us with all the supplies we needed. The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
[14:45] Thank you, Fred. Thank you very much. Last week, Tim spoke about our stories.

We each have a story of life and many of us have a story of walking with God over maybe a few years or many years and we have a story to tell.
And here, this is a very interesting story. I mentioned it about, it would have made a good film, but I think if the filmmakers got their hand on this story, they would completely ruin it.
Exciting as the film could be made to look. And it's, it was Paul's story, it was Luke's story, it was a story of all 276 people on board.
But it was also God's story. And have you ever wondered why every Sunday, or I hope they do, every Sunday in church, Christians read the Bible.
[16:06] We read from the Bible. And because this is God's story. Some people might have said, well, the Bible is a collection of stories about God and about people.

But the Bible is one story written by God with lots of other stories interwoven. And all the stories join together and they all have a meaning.
And if you're a believer here this morning, your story and my story is interwoven into that long story that God is writing that started with the creation of the world.
And in one way it will finish when Jesus comes back and yet it will never end God's story. And Paul had a lot going on in his life.

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If you read in 2 Corinthians chapter 11, he lists his sufferings. And why did this man suffer so much?
[17:12] you say, well, you might be here this morning for the first time and you've never heard of you don't know who Paul is. Who's this Paul you're talking about? What's so special about him?

I'll give you just a few minutes of the history of Paul. He was born probably five years after Jesus. He was born in a city called Tarsus which is in modern day Turkey.
It was a Roman colony. He grew up as a Roman citizen. That was a great benefit to him. I noticed that Tarsus was 12 miles from the sea.
So when I was reading about all these people getting to land some could swim and some went on bits of wood of the ship I thought I wonder which Paul did.
and I was interested whether Tarsus was near enough to the sea that Paul would have gone as a boy to the sea and learnt to swim. I don't know. It doesn't really matter.
[18:15] But Paul was a very religious Jew. He went to Jerusalem and there he trained under a man named Gamaliel and Paul was set for a very high position in the Jewish faith.

He says that he was a Pharisee a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He was faultless. He kept the law and that included persecuting the church.
He hated the church of Jesus Christ. He hated the new churches and the Christians that were springing up all over that part of the world at that time. He saw them as a threat to his authority and to him his authority was very important.
But he had to learn that he had to come under the authority of somebody else. And you know that's one of the hardest things in life we all have to learn that we have to submit our authority to somebody else.
And that person should be Jesus Christ. And many of you know the story he was on that journey to Damascus. He was a bad man really.
[19:34] He thought he was good. He thought he was doing the right thing. He was actually getting hold of Christians not just men but women as well and he was putting them into prison. And on the way he met with Jesus Christ a bright light shone around and he became blind.

And you know just have to say that here that's the most wonderful and important thing that can happen to any man or woman is to meet with Jesus Christ.
And if you're here this morning and you haven't been before you might be a visitor you may have been before just want to say if you've never met with Jesus Christ you can meet with Jesus Christ this morning because this story will show us just what it means to meet with Jesus.
and he was taken into Damascus and a man called Ananias went to see him and a Christian and he prayed for him and Jesus said to Ananias he said I'm going to show Paul how much he must suffer for my name.
So Paul was swapping a privileged position in the Jewish organisation and the Jewish hierarchy where he would have been pretty safe he was swapping it to suffer and he didn't know what and if you go to 2 Corinthians 11 25 it says that he lists his sufferings he says he was beaten with rods three times he was stoned and it says he was shipwrecked three times and he spent a day and a night in the deep in the ocean and so you can imagine when Paul is on this ship going to Rome and it starts off well you know they go off down the down the longer sea and it says doesn't it that there was a sail we put out to sea and we passed the
[21:53] Lear Cyprus the winds were against us it soon got a bit tough the winds soon blew and Paul must have thought what's going on here no Lord not another shipwreck Lord I anything but another shipwreck and you know you could ask well why is Acts 27 in the Bible why well because it happened obviously but why couldn't Paul have had an easy trip to Rome he'd just been in Jerusalem he'd been he'd been threatened with beatings he'd been nearly pulled apart by the crowd he'd been on trial before three rulers and you might have thought well Lord you know it's been pretty tough a nice quiet little sea voyage with some fresh air to get to Rome before I have the challenges there would be would be great but you know

God has other ideas have you ever found that in your life God has other ideas to your ideas have you have you ever found that actually God's ideas are better you know can I ask you this morning who's writing the story of your life and I've had to ask myself there's nothing a preacher should ask you that he hasn't asked himself but who this morning who today is writing the story of your life are you writing it are you trying to write it Tony's going to tell me who's writing the story of your life Tony

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he's doing it through Jesus Christ and he's 92 isn't that wonderful and I hope you would say the same that your journey is being written by God what's God saying to you this morning what's he saying to me he's really interested you see there's so much detail in this passage and we only have a limited time but

Paul was a man of authority can you sort of imagine it you know there's the boat there and when they were in Fairhavens and there's the they call in the pilot I'm not sure I couldn't quite find out whether that means he's the captain but anyhow the pilot or captain and the owner these important people and of course the owner he didn't want to stop in Fairhavens because time was money he wanted to get this Egyptian wheat to Rome and Rome needed the wheat and then up jumps this prisoner and he says hang on a minute hang on don't sail stay here for the winter it's going to be rough and they say well he said it's going to be disastrous and bring great loss to the ship and cargo verse 10 and to our own lives also but the centurion this was the man who was in charge of the prisoners instead of listening to what

Paul said followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner since the harbour was unsuitable to winter in the majority decided we should sail on hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there but as we know when they wanted to stop in Phoenix they were going too quickly and they sailed by they were driven by because of the sea the north easter came down and we were driven along we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure it's interesting the detail and the struggle I guess the prisoners helped they lowered they took the lifeboat onto the boat onto the ship and they put ropes around the ship to hold it together that was the ships weren't quite like they were today and then in verse 19 they threw the ships tackle overboard with their own hands and the end of verse 20 we finally gave up all hope of being saved pretty grim wasn't it here's this

Paul and Luke and they gave up all hope of being saved saved and but this is where this was somebody else's part of this story and that's God God was part of this story and God had a way out God had an answer and if just tell you this morning that if God's part of your story you'll have a way out there will be a way through he won't let you down so Paul was quite sort of direct here are all these 276 hungry men in verse 21 and Paul didn't sort of just sidle up to the centurion and say excuse me sir actually you know if you'd have listened don't you think you should have listened to what I told you and we should have we should have wintered back in

[27:41] Fairhaven and we would have been spared all this trouble it says no he seemed to speak quite directly he says men you should have spared yourselves this damage and loss but he wasn't the kind of person that said well that's that's yeah I'm going to tell you but he had an answer but now I urge you to keep up your courage because not one of you will be lost wow that's a risk isn't it not one of you will be lost did you find sometimes that the Christian life is full of risks or are you a bit like me you try and play the Christian life safe there's a lovely quotation here from a commentator called Phil Moore you might not want to hear this but this is what Phil Moore says and actually we'll see as we go on through this story that it's true being a

Christian is about taking risks not complacent not complacent not complacency and peace and our time unless we grasp that suffering is part of the Christian life I'll read that again unless we grasp that suffering is part of the Christian life we will shrink back play it safe and forever be unfruitful Paul was a man who was fruitful because he believed in Jesus Christ he says I consider everything as a loss compared to the greatness of knowing Jesus Christ how how important is Jesus Christ to you this morning is somebody something a person is he there for Sundays and maybe sometimes in the week or or does he does he does he run our lives where are we under his authority and the so we go on and I'm where I'm running out of time this is the key if you take nothing else away this morning it's verse 23 last night

Paul says he justifies what he says he says last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and to whom I serve stood beside me and said do not be afraid Paul the God to whom I belong and whom I serve I don't know whether that's quite the thing that you would say to your neighbour over the fence if you wanted to tell them about Jesus but it's the same thing in essence it's the God whom I serve and to whom I belong and Paul said he stood beside me and said do not be afraid and now that's comforting for more than one reason not just that God said don't be afraid but it's actually quite comforting to know that Paul must have been afraid and we're we're just going to we're just going to in a minute to just think about fear and you know there's fear is an emotion it's it's a good in some ways it's a good emotion because it's the fear of falling off the cliff that stops you going too near the edge but there's also a fear that paralyzes us and stops us doing what we should do and

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Paul was told not to be afraid and so as it goes on he says he's very definite in verse 31 he says unless these men stay with the ship you cannot be saved and then verse 33 he uses his authority that God has given him just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat and there's a lovely picture there and he says not one of you will lose a single hair from his head this is Paul's God at work is this is this how God works in my life is this how God works in your life he gives us confidence he helps us to have faith and takes risks he helps us to to go through the suffering and to know that we are going to suffer we are going to have difficulties we're not going to have an easy life but you see if you say well

I'm not going to I'm not and if you're sitting here this morning and you're thinking about giving your life to Jesus I tell you it won't be easy sometimes preachers say well give your life to Jesus and it will be good well it will be good but it won't be easy and you know he does that because he wants us to love him and rely on him Jesus has demonstrated he suffered more than anyone when he died on the cross for your sins and for my sin and so Paul urged them to eat and just jumping ahead a bit they they all got safely to land quite remarkable wasn't it 276 people got safely to land and nobody nobody was drowned and they doesn't say anybody was injured and then they had a wonderful sort of gospel outreach on the island of malta and took the gospel to malta was that why was that why god allowed acts 27 to happen so the gospel could get to malta was it to teach the people on the boat something you know this is a little bit of a just

[34:13] I'll just finish with this this is a little bit of a picture I had it's not biblical and you may think it's a bit way off but I do believe that when we're in heaven we will recognize each other I think scripture says that if I'm wrong you can tell me from scripture but imagine we're in heaven one day or in that new heaven and new earth and you see a little group of men in the corner and they're obviously very grateful very happy to be in heaven and you go over to them and say you chaps seem happy what's your story you had a story and they say well actually yeah we're some of the sailors that were on that ship when Paul got shipwrecked and if it hadn't been for that storm we wouldn't have heard the gospel so whatever you're going through God wants to use it to glorify Jesus to share to help you to share the gospel because that's our number one thing that we should do and he wants to deepen your relationship with him and he wants to do that because he loves you just before the band come back up just had a real sense that

God wants to and this has been confirmed by at least two other people that God wants to deal with fear in our hearts this morning and so perhaps a band could come up and we're going to sing Amazing Grace because one of the best antidote to fear is grace is experiencing God's grace so this was written by a man who also had a shipwreck and found Jesus through a shipwreck Amazing Grace how sweet the sound saved a wretch like me this is John Newton let's just sing this verse and then we'll just stop if we could after this verse if you like to stand and to sing

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