

We open our Bible this morning and read another story that assures us that God really is there. He really is aware of us, and watching over us, carefully overseeing the events in our lives and guiding our lives with his loving plan and purpose! And he is doing this even through the violent storms in our lives!

God fills the universe beyond the farthest galaxy but he is also always right here in the room with us, in the space around us, and in the storm with us. Just as he was with Paul on that ship in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. He is as close as the air we breathe. God is a very present help in time of trouble! This is stunningly good news that never gets old! God's loving care, and his nearness really solves everything about life!

So often our view of things is very focused on the natural, the rational, the things we can see with our eyes and comprehend with our reason. But the Bible tells us...life is not governed solely by natural, or mechanical laws. What we see with our eyes is not all there is. God is there! He sees all, knows all, and is watching over his people for good. The angels of God are there, serving us in our hour need. The unseen God and his unseen armies of angels are as real as the walls of your home, or the pavement you drove to church on.

We must continually rub up against the God of the Bible and keep reminded of how real he is. The writer of Hebrews said, "He who comes to God must believe that he is there!". One of the great benefits of reading scripture, is to awaken our hearts to the God who really is there. The scripture awakens our hearts to the joy and the excitement and the comfort of a real God who is really with us. One

of the main blessings I personally will take from the book of Acts is that God has broken through to us through the outpouring of his Spirit and he continues to break through to us by his Spirit and his voice and his activity in our lives. This is the joy of life! Knowing and experiencing God!

God promises to care for us, to commune with us and intervene in our lives, daily, with goodness and mercy! If we choose to do so, we can put our trust in him and experience an amazing level of peace, and confidence! That kind of life with God is available to us!

The story in this chapter is one of the most interesting stories in the Bible. It has danger, it has drama, it has a disagreement between Paul and the ship's owner and pilot. It has 276 people facing shipwreck and drowning at sea, and then at the last minute they are all saved.... Yet with all the fascinating details of the story, the one part of the story that far outshines everything else... is that God himself is in the story! When they had given up all hope of being saved, God sent an angel to Paul at night and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.'

And just as God was apart of this story, he is present and working in your story, even the one you are going through right now! Even if your life, or some part of your life, seems very stormy and unsettled!

God with us, speaking to us, watching over us, is the greatest thing in the world. The more you trust and experience this, the more it will completely overshadow everything else in your life. The more it will outshine everything else! David said, "Because the Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing!" He said, "Your love is better than

life!” I will praise you as long as I live and in your name I will lift up my hands. I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing my lips will praise you...Because You are my help, I will sing in the shadow of your wings. I cling to you because you uphold me.” David cannot contain himself over how great a thing it is to be loved by God, helped by God, and upheld by God. It is so great that it more than compensates for every other lack or disappointment, or loss. It is so great that it overshadows, and overcomes our fears. His love mean more to us than anything else in life. His ever present help makes us secure and able to sing through life!

Paul wouldn't choose to be shipwrecked again, but I am pretty sure he never forgot the comforting words of God that came through the angel that night, when all hope was gone. And am sure that he would not trade that experience for anything in the world, even a danger free life! I personally don't like all the drama and change in life! And I sometimes feel very needy! But it is in my most extreme need and sometimes loss of heart and hope, that I experience God's presence and hear his word, in the sweetest ways. And those times are priceless!

Let's go through the key things we need to see from this story: Paul was being sent to Rome as a prisoner on a ship. He was in the custody of a Roman Centurion named Julius, along with other prisoners. Luke was with him too, and another believer, Aristarchus. But the winds were blowing against them and slowed them down! They transferred to another ship at Myra, but they continued to move slowly, and with great difficulty, they reached a place called Fair Havens on the Island of Crete.

But by now, winter was coming, and with it, greater storms, and Paul argued that they should not go on. But the Centurion sided with the ship's owner and pilot who wanted to sail on. They tried to reach another harbor on the Island of Crete. But immediately, a powerful storm came up, called a northeaster, something like a hurricane. They lost complete control of the ship and were driven by the wind. They wrapped ropes around the hull of the ship to try to keep it from breaking apart.

Luke said, "Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo. 19And on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. 20When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned." This apparently was the general consensus of everyone on the ship and maybe even Luke and Paul had come to the point where they felt, "This is it".

In most circumstances, unless we are just downright depressed and pessimistic, we cling on to some hope that things will get better. But Luke says, they were beyond that point here.

*The first obvious lesson from this story is: There are storms in life! Life is not all storms and disasters, but often it is, and when it is not, there is almost always a headwind, or sense that we are hindered.

Even when we are doing the will of God, we can experience serious difficulties, in doing what he has given us to do. Luke said, "the winds were against us." The winds were against them and everything else seemed to go wrong too. Paul had already written Romans chapter 8 at this time. "If God be for us who can be against us." God is for us and that always outweighs everything else. But it

is still true that a certain person, or a circumstance, or even Satan himself can be against us. I think it is impossible to understand life and the opposition we encounter without understanding the reality of Satanic opposition. To believe in God's goodness and sovereignty does not mean we have to say that everything that happens to us is good, in itself. Sometimes we just have to say that the winds are working against us!

Sometimes, like Paul we are caught in a storm because of the wrong or sinful decisions of others. Paul didn't think they should have set sail, but he was not in a position to control what the ship owner and captain would do. Often we suffer problems and setbacks because of a decision somebody else made; a spouse, a boss, a company. But None of these things keep God from working for us and getting us where he wants us to go!

Sometimes things that we rely on to do certain things for us, let us down or give out and put us in a bad way. The ship Paul was on did not hold together in the storm. Our basements leak, or septic systems give out, or cars breakdown, or computers fail, or bones break or bodies fail us. Sometimes the obstacles and set backs are so great, it just seems really hard to get things done! And at times we get to that point where we lose hope! But that is never the end point God has for us!

*Second: We see that God has something he wants us to hear, in our storms. He has something to say to you in your circumstances. At this point in the story when Luke says, we had lost all hope, "God sent an angel to Paul at night and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.'".

When you feel that all hope is gone, or when you merely feel frustrated with minor set backs, the most important responsibility you have is to hear what God is saying to you. David said, “I will listen to what God the LORD will say; for He will surely speak peace Psalm 85:8. The prophet Habakkuk, when completely perplexed by what was happening to Israel, said, “I will stand at my guard post, and station myself on the tower, and I will keep watch to see what He will say to me”.

There will always be our own thoughts, the voice of discouragement, perhaps even the thoughts of the Evil One, but we need to ask and seek, “what is the Lord saying here?”. One thing for sure, he is saying, “Do not fear”. Or “Do not be anxious.”. He is speaking things to you that bring peace.

The heart of God is to bring comfort and assurance and peace to the heart of his people, in our distressing situations. One of the Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah, was that he would “know how to sustain the weary one with a word”. Jesus knows how to sustain you with a word! When you are at the bottom...

Third: Being a man or woman who hears God’s voice in the storm gives you a voice of confidence in times of chaos and confusion. Paul said, “take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told’. Paul is just a prisoner on this ship but he becomes the leader of these 276 people because he has heard from God! Ray Stedman “The danger was just as evident, the waves just as high, the darkness just as intense, the hope just as absent”... for Paul as it was for everyone else! “Everything was exactly the same, except that God granted to him an encouraging word, a secret

knowledge...” He gave Paul “an inward assurance that enabled Paul to stand out from the rest of them..”.

When everyone else can see nothing but disaster, we are not listening to the voices of fear, but to the voice of God. We are not responding to life with panic but faith! This is one of our most important callings in life!!

In Rudyard Kipling’s famous poem “If”, he wrote, “If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you....then you will be a man, my son”. I would say, if you can keep your head when when all about are losing theirs and blaming it on you, then you are probably a Christian who is listening to God!

*Fourth: We see the reality of angels sent by God using to help us. 21 Paul stood up among them and said, “Men,....this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, 24and he said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul...”

It was God who came to Paul and assured him, but he came through the ministry of his angel. We don’t know why God does that sometimes but it pleases him at times to work through one of these marvelous spirit beings he created, who serve him day and night.

Of course there are those who would make too much of angels, but we can’t go to the opposite side and make too little of them! Angels are servants of God and God chooses to work through or even to speak through angels for the good of his people. We see this all throughout the Bible and we continue to see God using his angels to help his people in the church, after Jesus ascended to heaven.

Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. Psalm 103:20,21 NIV, Or praise the LORD, you armies of angels who serve him and do his will! NLT

I got together with my brother Paul a couple of weeks ago for coffee. He mentioned book he had been reading by the Puritan Minister Cotton Mather titled: Wonders of the Invisible World. While I was looking for that book I also ran across a book by Richard Baxter titled, “The Certainty of the World of Spirits”. Both books deal with the reality of evil spirits as well as angels. But the thing that impressed me about both of these Puritan pastors was their absolute conviction of the reality of the unseen world and the very real activity of God and Satan permeating all that goes on here.

Richard Baxter said, “the angels of God are not useless to us, but their ministry is one of God’s means for our preservation, and we owe them love and thanks for all their love and service.” The book of Acts, indeed the whole Bible, shows us that the unseen realm is not far off but right here and available to help in time of need!

Fifth: We must put complete confidence in what God has said to us. Verse 25 “So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. But we must run aground on some island.” Trust is placing your confidence in God. Then speaking and living from that place of confidence. You always have the choice: You can place your trust in your own fears and anxious thoughts that come in to your mind; when they speak you can listen to them or you can listen to God and put your trust in him.

Trust in God, is a kind of abandonment to God, or a leaving ourselves and our futures in his hands. We are in the care of a good shepherd. And there is no reason for us to be afraid of what comes next.

Trusting God means trusting God with the outcome of our situations. Trust means leaving things in God hands WHILE the situation is unresolved and unsolved, when the storm is still raging, when it still looks like we are going to shipwreck. Psalm 9:10 “Those who know your name trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you.” This must become the attitude of our heart.

We show that we trust God by the entire orientation of our lives! Paul showed that he really did trust God by his actions and his words. Verse 33 says, “As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing. 34Therefore I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you.” 35And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat. 36Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves.

Trusting God or not, shows in our attitude, in the things we say, and how we say it. It shows in our ability to encourage others and lift their hope. Doubt and fear are contagious, but so is faith in God!!

Sixth: Even though we feel the full force of the storm God always delivers us. Verse 41 “But striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by the surf. 42The soldiers' plan was to kill the

prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape. 43But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, 44and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land.

God delivered Paul and all with him, but it was as the storm continued on! It broke apart our ship, and they were all cast into the sea, floating on a piece of lumber! Nothing seemed safe, or sure! Yet God got them all safely to land. Maybe you feel like that is a picture of some area of life this morning. Maybe you feel like you only have a scrap of wood to keep you afloat!

That doesn't mean God isn't with you, and it doesn't mean he is through with you. It might just be the way he is answering your prayers, or the way he is fulfilling his word to you. Hold on to whatever little seems left and trust God. He WILL get you to where he wants you to go. He will use you for his kingdom and his glory! Just as he did for Paul.

