

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Lost and Found Series, Sermon #5

Sermon Title: What to Do When You Change Directions: Paul's Shipwreck on Malta, Acts 27:14-20 and 28:3-11

Date preached: October 1, 2017

INTRODUCTION: There are times in our lives when we might change directions. Perhaps we are lost in life and seek new direction, or perhaps we change course for different reasons. We might lose our focus or direction. We may become sidetracked and distracted. Sometimes things may happen outside of our control. Sickness or death of a loved one might wreck your plans. Financial loss might change your plans. It is very possible that several times in your life you'll be headed in a direction to accomplish certain goals. One small diversion could lead to another and then another and then another. And, then suddenly you may realize you changed directions altogether.

The Apostle Paul was no stranger to diversion in plans. He knew all about it. This morning I want to look at one such occasion when Paul found himself where he did not plan to be.

There are four points to today's message:

1. Paul expected the unexpected.
2. The castaways became friends of the islanders.
3. Paul remained true to who he was during his diversion.
4. At the right time, Paul got back on course.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: Paul had become a prisoner for preaching the Gospel, and he was taken to Rome. The centurion in charge of him was kind to him, and along the way, he allowed Paul to visit some of his friends. Eventually, they found a ship setting sail for Italy, and they boarded it.

A lot of time had been wasted because of light winds, and Paul said the coming season was not favorable to sailing. But, they ignored him and continued.

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SCRIPTURE: Acts 27:14-20 ¹⁴ Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the Northeaster, swept down from the island. ¹⁵ The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. ¹⁶ As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure, ¹⁷ 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 Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. ¹⁸ We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. ¹⁹ On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. ²⁰ When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.

An angel appeared to Paul and told him not to be afraid because he had to appear before Caesar. This gave Paul the confidence to tell everyone none of them would die and only the ship would be wrecked.

After fourteen days, Paul told the 276 people on board the ship to eat. They saw land and decided to run the boat aground.

First, PAUL EXPECTED THE UNEXPECTED.

EXPLANATION: Paul was headed in one direction, and a storm outside of his control took him in another direction. The tone of story leads us to believe Paul wasn't really fazed by the diversion. All through the Book of Acts, we see where Paul's plans changed.

APPLICATION: You'll find changes of directions in life will have new challenges and new people.

EXPLANATION: Here's something for you to write down and remember: I am not aware of anyone in scripture who was a follower of the Lord who had a predictable life. Think of people in the Bible: Joseph, Moses, Ruth, Job, Samuel. If we were to brainstorm Biblical characters who did not have predictable lives, in just a few minutes, we'd reach a hundred people.

Why is life so unpredictable with God? I have several possible answers: (1) He wants to show himself strong in a new way; (2) He wants to challenge your faith; or, (3) Because God accomplishes his will through his people, he has to move people around to accomplish his will.

APPLICATION: Don't be so headstrong your world falls apart when your direction changes.

SCRIPTURE: Proverbs 16:9 ⁹*In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.*

EXPLANATION: In other words, we should not sit around doing nothing. As we move forward, God will direct our steps. I believe he wants us to take that first step of faith, though.

APPLICATION: As a believer in Jesus Christ, expect the unexpected, but don't be afraid.

- Paul expected the unexpected, and—

Second, THE CASTAWAYS BECAME FRIENDS WITH THE ISLANDERS.

SCRIPTURE: Acts 28:1-2 ¹*Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. ²The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold.*

EXPLANATION: The islanders were friendly to the castaways, and the castaways were friendly to the islanders. It doesn't always happen that way. Sometimes when people find themselves in places they don't want to be, they take out their frustration on one another. And, that's easy to do when we are away from where we are comfortable.

What if the castaways and islanders hadn't been friendly with each other? "Hey we didn't ask you to spend winter here. You've interrupted our little community and we don't like it!" "Well, we didn't want to be here for the winter!"

ILLUSTRATION: King Nebuchadnezzar took some of the Israelites and exiled them to Babylon. They were not where they wanted to be. The Lord told them what to do in their situation in Jeremiah 29.

SCRIPTURE: Jeremiah 29:5-7 ⁵“*Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce.* ⁶*Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease.* ⁷*Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.*”

ILLUSTRATION: Everyone who has served in the military knows it’s better to make peace with and be friends with all those around you as soon as possible because otherwise, the chances for a unit’s success are zero.

ILLUSTRATION: I told our Wednesday night crowd they’d hear it again soon, so here it is. There is a movie called *All Saints*, about a church in Smyrna that was going to close, but God had other plans. The pastor and his congregation tried a big farming project to raise enough money to pay the mortgage and his salary. Due to a flood, the project failed. The pastor was distraught, and he said, “We are right back where we started.” His wife took him outside the church and showed him all the people they had met in their effort and she said, “We are not back where we started; we are at a completely new place.”

The pastor had been a paper salesman whose project failed. What he did as a pastor was more meaningful even though his project failed. Had he continued in his earlier career, he would have missed out on the people he met and all the lessons learned.

APPLICATION: When your direction changes, make peace with the situation and those around you. Remember Paul and his shipmates. Remember the islanders. Remember those military experiences. And, remember the pastor’s wife in the movie.

- Paul expected the unexpected,
- The castaways became friends with the islanders, and—

Third, PAUL REMAINED AUTHENTIC DURING HIS CHANGE OF DIRECTION.

SCRIPTURE: Acts 28:3-9 ³ Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. ⁴ 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.” ⁵ But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. ⁶ The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead; but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.

⁷ There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and showed us generous hospitality for three days. ⁸ 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. ⁹ When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured.

EXPLANATION: Before Paul came to the island, he worked miracles with the power of the Holy Spirit, including healing people. While stranded on the island, he did the same thing.

When Paul was stunned by the bright light of God on the Damascus Road and was converted, his life changed forever. Once a murderer of Christians, Paul became a fervent follower of Christ himself. Over time, he had such a serious revelation from God that he really had no fear of anything. He was completely confident and sold out to Jesus. He was the same guy everywhere he went.

When he spoke to King Agrippa and others in authority, he was the same man as he was when he was in jail. When he was full or hungry, he was the same man. He did not behave differently according to circumstance. If there was any behavior change at all, it was that of becoming more faithful to God.

ILLUSTRATION: When I was one of two chaplains to over 400 recruiters, one of the recruiters told me he'd come a long way in his Christian walk. For years, when

he went to conferences, he became a different person than he was at home. He partied in a not-so-healthy way, and he said the Lord convicted him of his behavior.

APPLICATION: Wherever you are, you are God’s missionary. When you have a change of direction, it’s no different. Paul knew that. He saw the change of direction as an opportunity.

Review—

- Paul expected the unexpected,
- The castaways became friends with the islanders,
- Paul remained authentic during his change of direction, and—

Fourth, AT THE RIGHT TIME, PAUL GOT BACK ON COURSE.

SCRIPTURE: Acts 28:10-11 ¹⁰ *They honored us in many ways; and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed.*

¹¹ *After three months we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island—*

EXPLANATION: Paul was headed for house arrest in Rome. I cannot find a scripture which says he would rather not be a prisoner because he saw everything as an opportunity to share the Gospel. As a prisoner, he did not run away when the ship ran aground and everyone swam for dear life.

The Bible tells us he and the ship’s crew were on the island for three months, and then they resumed their course. Paul was patient because along with expecting the unexpected, he came to realize everything in life is temporary. He knew eventually they’d be sailing again. What lay ahead, he did not know. But, he had confidence in the one who knew.

APPLICATION: Everything in life is temporary. Everything changes. Even things that seem permanent are really temporary because one day we are leaving this world.

ILLUSTRATION: This week, a woman told me about a particularly hard time she had when her kids were little. Her family’s direction changed course when they left

a rather secure life and went into the ministry. She said the financial insecurity during those years made her fearful, but in her words, “We made it.” She said if she were doing it all over again, she’d have a different perspective.

CONCLUSION: Sometimes it’s hard to have a healthy perspective if you are in the middle of something unpleasant. The Bible lesson today should help us have a better disposition when our lives change direction.

At the right time, you’ll get back on course. Or, you’ll have a new course better than the old one—all in God’s timing.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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