

What To Do When All Hope Is Lost Acts 27:1-20

Slide 1

This week's helpful hint from The Worst-Case Scenario Survival Handbook is: How to survive adrift at sea:

1. Stay aboard your boat as long as possible before getting into your life raft.
2. Get in the life raft and take whatever supplies you can carry.
3. If you are in cold water/weather get warm.
4. Find food if you can.
5. Try to get to land.
6. If you see a plane or boat nearby try to signal it.

So far, we've looked at two Worst Case Scenarios from the Bible: What to do if you're swallowed by a big fish and What to do if you have to fight a giant.

In life we tend to remember the storms with more clarity than we do the sunny days, so this week we're going to examine What to Do When All Hope Is Lost.

Acts 27:1, "When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment."

The story began with a plan. If you're familiar with the book of Acts you know that Paul has mentioned several times his desire to go to Rome, the political center of the known world.

Nobody actually knows who started the Christian work in Rome, although it's been suggested that it was started by some who had heard the message on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem.

What we do know is that the church had become a major presence in the city within 10 years of Jesus' death and resurrection and visiting the church in Rome was apparently on Paul's bucket list.

But it wasn't as easy as jumping on a plane or boarding a cruise ship, though it's funny how things have a way of working out.

After Paul had returned to Jerusalem, from his third missionary journey, he had been arrested and ended up facing charges before the Roman authorities.

To make a long story short, Paul invoked his right as a Roman citizen and demanded to be tried in front of Caesar.

The local authorities saw this as a chance to rid themselves of a problem and arranged for Paul to be shipped off to Rome. I'm sure Paul was thinking, *"Don't you love it when a plan comes together?"*

The plan was for Paul to be put on a ship and sail to Rome. A simple plan, but J.R.R. Tolkien cautions, *"It does not do to leave a live dragon out of your calculations, if you live near him."*

Just because you have a plan, doesn't mean everything is going to come together the way you planned.

Dwight D. Eisenhower said, *"In preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable."*

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For Paul and his companions, their plan worked perfectly, until they set sail. They should have paid heed to Allen Saunders who wrote, *"Life is what happens to us while we are making other plans."*

Listen to how the early part of their trip was described:

Acts 27:4, "From there we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us."

Acts 27:7a, "We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty arriving off Cnidus. When the wind did not allow us to hold our course,..."

Acts 27:9, "Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Day of Atonement."

But things seemed to be getting better, Acts 27:13, *"When a gentle south wind began to blow, they saw their opportunity; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete."*

One storm after another, but through it all they weathered the storms. So, the plans had changed, they weren't going to get to Rome when they thought they would, but they were still going to get to Rome.

There were some storms, but things weren't horrible. Yet, good weather doesn't last.

Kind of one of those situations where someone says, *"Cheer up things could be worse. I cheered up and sure enough things got worse."* Kind of like 2020.

In 2016 Jazz artist Charlie Hunter released an album entitled *"Everybody Has a Plan Until They Get Punched in the Mouth."* Which of course was a nod to a statement attributed to boxer Mike Tyson.

What Tyson actually said was, *"Everybody has a plan until they get hit. Then, like a rat, they stop in fear and freeze."*

If a quote by Mike Tyson doesn't seem to carry much weight with you, The Duke of Wellington said, *"Strategy ends when combat begins."* So, here's what happened.

Acts 27:14-20, *“Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the 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 Cauda, 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 Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor^[b] and let the ship be driven along. 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. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.”*

Of all the events, that are described here, I do believe that the scariest was this last verse. Acts 27:20, *“When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.”*

They had tried everything they could think of, and it wasn’t enough, and now all hope was gone. They were ready to give up.

There’s a website called Despair.com. It’s an un-motivational site. I even bought a couple of posters for my office when I worked at Lockheed.

Listen to a couple of these gems:

- It could be that the purpose of your life is only to serve as a warning to others.
- The secret to success is knowing who to blame for your failures.
- I believe that children are our future, and that terrifies me.

But the reality is that Paul’s story didn’t end with verse 20. If you keep reading Paul’s story, you discover these words in Acts 28:14, *“And so we came to Rome.”*

They arrived at their destination. Paul's dream had been achieved, and what had seemed impossible just months before was now a reality. Now, back to the story.

The storm lasted for fourteen days, that must have been the longest fourteen days of their lives. What should we do when we feel like hope has left the room? A motivational poster just will not work!

Slide 3 - Paul Realized that Hope Had Been Lost.

It was only when everyone believed that all hope was lost that Paul stepped up to the plate. Paul knew that, if they were going to survive, the hope everyone believed had been lost would have to be found.

Shortly after that we discover Paul calling the crew together for a pep talk. He gave them practical advice and spiritual advice, and I suspect that Paul was talking to himself as much as he was talking to the others.

It's only when we discover that we've lost hope that we can begin the quest to finding hope again.

Roy Williams is an Advertising guru out of Austin Texas. Williams wrote these words, *"Every dream of the future is a seed. But until your dream falls into the ground and dies, it cannot burst from the ground and deliver the harvest you seek. Is your commitment strong enough to survive the death of your dream? Will you be found still hanging on when hope has fled, when the room is dark and everyone believes you a fool?"*

I like what John Wesley wrote, *"Preach faith till you have it; and then, because you have it, you will preach faith."*

Ecclesiastes 9:4, *"Anyone who is among the living has hope—even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!"*

Acts 27:42-43, *“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. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land.”*

This was the second time that the commanding officer was there for Paul. The first time was when the sailors tried to abandon ship and leave the rest of them behind.

Slide 4 - Paul Realized that He Wasn’t Alone

Paul was in a bad situation, but he wasn’t alone, and he discovered that he had allies. Sometimes it easy to get in the mindset of: “Nobody loves me, everybody hates me.”

Without the commanding officer, Paul and those with him would have died. Paul knew that God was with him, but God did His work through a Roman soldier.

I love the story of the little boy who was having a nightmare and wanted his mother to sleep with him. She was trying to escape back to her own room, and she told her son, *“It’s ok, God loves you He’s with you.”*

Clinging to her, he protested, *“Yes I know God loves me, but right now I need someone who has skin on them.”*

For Paul, it was the Roman Centurion. When it seems like hope is gone, look around to see who is left. We might feel all alone during times of trouble, but we aren’t. We’re all in this together.

You may need to reach out to those around you for yourself or for them, but realize that we aren’t alone and we all need someone with skin on them from time to time.

Don't underestimate the power of your voice in someone's life today. When Paul called the crew and passengers together this was part of his message.

Acts 27:23-26, "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 up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."

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Conclusion

More than anything else, the realization that Rome was God's plan gave Paul the hope he had lost.

He realized that he wasn't in control, that God was, and if God wanted him in Rome then He wasn't going to die in a shipwreck.

Solomon wrote in Proverbs 16:1, *"To humans belong the plans of the heart, but from the LORD comes the proper answer of the tongue."*

When it seems like all hope is gone, understand that God has a plan. When it seemed like all hope was lost for the people of Israel, after they had been conquered by Babylon and taken captive, this was God's message for the nation:

Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

While I realize that this was written to the nation of Israel in a very different context, I think that God is still reminding us that he has a future and a hope for us today.

Romans 12:12, *“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”*