

Bi134 Acts

Lesson Bi134-42 Perilous Journey to Rome

Someone once said, “You can tell a lot about a man by the way he *acts*; you can tell even more about him by the way he *reacts*.” In today’s story we observe the apostle Paul both acting and reacting, and in both ways he bears witness to Christ.

The Roman soldiers escorted Paul and his companions to the waterfront. There they put them on a large merchant ship bound for Rome. Altogether there were 276 people aboard the ship. After many days of slow difficult sailing, they arrived at Fair Havens on the southern tip of the island of Crete. By that time, winter had arrived, and sea travel had become hazardous.

Nevertheless, the ship’s crew decided to venture on to a nearby port called Phoenix. It had a more suitable harbor in which to spend the winter. Paul, however, warned them, “Men, I perceive that our voyage is going to be disastrous. We will lose our ship and everything in it. We may even lose our lives!” The Roman sailors, however, chose to ignore Paul’s warning. So, when a soft south wind began to blow, they weighed anchor. The ship sailed off to the west, staying close to the shore of Crete.

Suddenly a great storm arose, and a violent wind drove their ship out into the open sea. For several days the crew fought to keep the ship afloat. They threw the cargo and tackle overboard. Finally, in despair, they abandoned all hope of being saved.

That’s when Paul called them all together. Lifting his voice above the gale, he addressed them. “Eat something,” he said. “You will need your strength.” He continued, “You should have listened to my advice. If you had, you would have avoided this tragedy. Now I tell you, put your trust in God. Last night an angel of the Lord came to me. He told me not to be afraid of dying in this storm, for I must stand before Caesar. He let me know that the ship itself will be lost, but everyone on board will be saved.” This word gave everyone the courage they needed to continue the struggle (Acts 27:1-26).

On the fourteenth night, the ship was driven toward an island and was about to run aground. When Paul saw some crewmembers trying to launch a lifeboat, he warned them, “Unless you stay with the ship, you will perish.” Later, as day was breaking, Paul again urged everyone to eat. “Just follow my instructions,” he said, “and not one of you will lose a single hair from his head.” Then, he gave thanks to God, and they ate together.

Then, in the distance, they spied a sandy beach and decided to let the ship run aground there. Hoisting the foresail to the wind, they made for the shoreline. The ship struck a sandbar with a great jolt. The bow stuck fast and the violent waves began pounding against the stern, breaking the ship into pieces. Seeing what was happening, the centurion ordered everyone to abandon ship and head for land. In this way everyone aboard was saved just as Paul had predicted (Acts 27:27-44).

Today's story occurs some 30 years after Paul's first encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road. On that day his life was forever changed. The great persecutor of the church became its passionate promoter. Throughout his life Paul never missed an opportunity to tell others about Jesus. He faithfully proclaimed Christ in homes and in open markets, in Jewish synagogues and in pagan temples, in humble classrooms and in stately courtrooms, in palaces and in prisons.

In this story, we again see Paul witnessing for Christ. However, he is now witnessing in a very different setting. He is prisoner on a Roman ship headed for Rome. There he will stand trial for crimes he did not commit. Let's look at two valuable lessons we can learn from how Paul conducted himself on this perilous journey to Rome.

The first lesson we learn from Paul's actions on his journey to Rome is that we can witness for Christ by allowing the Spirit to speak through us. The Spirit had moved through Paul in the past when he was preaching the gospel, casting out demons, and healing the sick. However, those were not the only times the Spirit moved through him. Paul lived his life in constant communion with the Spirit.

When the captain and his crew decided to sail from Fair Havens to another port, the Spirit of the Lord again spoke to Paul. Paul then warned the sailors against moving the ship. "I perceive that the voyage will be disastrous," he said. Later, when they were in the midst of the storm fighting for their lives, Paul again spoke to the crew, saying, "Men, you should have listened to me and not have sailed from Crete. If you would have done this, you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss."

But, how could Paul have known this? How could he have known what would happen in the future? He knew it because the Spirit revealed it to him. Then, when he spoke, he spoke by the Spirit. God had given him a word of knowledge, one of the nine gifts of the Spirit spoken of in 1 Corinthians 12.

Today, God wants to do the same through us. He wants to speak words of love, encouragement, and warning to those around us. If we are going to be used by God in this way, we, like Paul, must remain full of the Holy Spirit. We must be open to his promptings. Then, when he gives us a word for others, we must speak it with boldness and grace.

We learn a second lesson from Paul's actions in the storm. Not only are we to witness with our words, we are to witness by the way we conduct ourselves in tough situations. In the midst of the storm Paul testified, "I have faith in God." He then demonstrated his faith by the way he reacted to the storm. When others panicked, he remained cool. He calmly took control of the situation. As a result, the people listened to him, and their lives were saved. Paul was able to do this because he trusted in God and listened to the voice of the Spirit.

Paul's confession that "I have faith in God" was not an empty confession. It summed up the core of his life and ministry. Years earlier he had written to the Christians in Galatia, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body,

I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). Paul’s confession should be our confession: “I live by faith in the Son of God.”

Finally, when the time came for the sailors to run the ship aground and make for the shore, Paul urged everyone to eat. He then “took bread, and gave thanks to God in front of them all.” Paul’s giving of thanks served as a witness to those who heard his prayer. His confidence in God in this desperate situation encouraged the others to trust in God also.

How we act—or react—in trying circumstances will influence others. Paul’s steadfast confidence in God encouraged others to trust in him. If we act in confident faith, it will witness to others. They, too, will be encouraged to put their faith in God. However, if we react in fear and unbelief, others will be reluctant to trust in God. We witness to others, not only with our words, but also by the way we respond to life’s problems.

This lesson is **important** because we learn how we can witness to others in difficult times.

The **main truth** we learn from this lesson is that we witness by allowing the Spirit to speak through us and also by demonstrating confident trust in God during difficult times.

Let’s now **review** some important truths we have learned from this lesson.

1. What terrifying thing happened to Paul and the other people on the ship bound for Rome?
A. [PAUSE] If you answered, “They were caught in a great storm at sea,” you answered correctly.
2. How was Paul able to know that the voyage would result in disaster?
A. [PAUSE] If you answered that Paul was able to know this because the Spirit told him, you are correct.
3. Why was everyone aboard the ship able to be saved from the great sea storm?
A. [PAUSE] If you answered that they were all saved because they listened to the advice of Paul, who himself had heard from the Lord, you are right.
4. What two witnessing lessons can we learn from how Paul acted on the voyage to Rome?
A. [PAUSE] If you answered, “We witness by allowing the Spirit to speak through us and by the way we conduct ourselves in stressful situations,” you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it until you can tell the story of Paul’s perilous journey to Rome to others. Teach the two lessons on witnessing to other believers around you. You should also pray and ask God to use you as he used Paul on the voyage to Rome.