

Shipwrecked & Rescued: 3. How Not to Survive a Shipwreck

Acts 27

June 24, 2018

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Growing up, one of the expectations that my parents had for me was getting my lifesaving certification. It was not enough to learn to swim and be able to save myself. They wanted me to be ready to save someone else. So, the summer between my junior and senior years in high school, I took the Red Cross lifesaving course at the lake in our small town. The instructor was our high school gym teacher. We learned what to do when someone was in distress. Only as a last resort were we to make contact with a person who was drowning. Better to bring a life preserver, a life vest, or a canoe paddle – something for the drowning person to hang on to – because we were told many rescuers drowned after reaching the person in distress who panicked and pulled the rescuer under water. Panic could defeat the effort to be rescued. And that's exactly what my instructor tried to do in the final exam. I was bigger than her but when I swam out to where she was and then reached out for her she grabbed hold of my long hair and tried to get on top of me, pushing below the surface. She had warned us this was a life or death experience. I got lose from her grip and pushed away and waited until she got tired of fighting and when she was exhausted, I was able to put my arm around her and hold her tight against me as I swam to shore. What I learned was how panic could defeat a rescue. I also learned it's one thing to say: help is on the way and quite another thing to be the help that's needed.

Do any of you remember seeing this photo? [slide] Two months ago, a Southwest airline flight had to make an emergency landing after an engine blew apart penetrating the fuselage resulting in a sudden loss of cabin pressure. Oxygen masks dropped and passenger hurried to put them on – improperly! How many of us have experienced the safety instruction from the flight attendant? I'm guessing some of these passengers on that plane had heard the safety demonstration so many times they could repeat the words – but in a moment of panic, they failed. Because they did not expect it would ever happen to them.

No one sets out in life expecting a shipwreck – and yet we install smoke detectors in our homes. We buy life insurance. We set up savings accounts. It's also why we need a caring community with a circle of friends. The unexpected happens. Some think the goal of life is to get by, to escape unscathed without failure, pain, or wreckage. Some Christians think the goal of the spiritual life is to get through life with a perfect score card – no major crises or screw-ups. But here's the thing: If you spend enough time on the water, something will go wrong. We cannot control everything and despite our best efforts to avoid pain and check all the right boxes, things will fall apart at some point. Cars crash, marriages fall apart, hearts break. It is not a reasonable plan – not really a plan at all to say – it will never happen to me.

For the past two weeks, we've looked at scenes from the Bible where a shipwreck was a real possibility. Tami began with the story of Jonah and how we sometimes contribute to the storms of life. We mess up. We get ourselves into trouble and like Jonah we try to control what cannot be controlled by running away rather than seeking the direction that God is ready to provide. And last week, we looked at what can happen when we find ourselves in the midst of circumstances beyond our control. When the disciples got on board the boat, the water was calm – calm enough that Jesus went to sleep – and when the storm suddenly appeared the disciples panicked, not realizing they had God's greatest resource right there with them. Jeanine Johnson told her family's story – 5 cancers, 90 surgeries, 3 miscarriages, anxiety, depression and in the face of overwhelming conditions when many would push God away, she described turning toward the master of the wind and the waves. Jesus take control. The idea for this series

came from the Vacation Bible School theme for next week. Our children will discover what it means to be rescued when we let Jesus take control.

Our scripture this morning is not the story of a potential shipwreck but an actual shipwreck of Paul's. He was a prisoner being transported to Rome. He had returned to Jerusalem against other's advice, but he wanted to bring an offering that had been collected to help the Christians in Jerusalem. But when he entered the Temple, he was arrested and brought to trial and finally asked that his trial be decided by Caesar in Rome which was his right as a Roman citizen. It would be his way of finally bringing the message of the gospel directly to Caesar. So the plan was that the boat with 276 passengers would depart Caesarea and cross the Mediterranean Sea to reach Rome. This was a journey that always involved risk. Sailing the Mediterranean between the middle of September and March was considered dangerous and that was precisely when this trip began, reaching the island of Crete by October. At this point, God revealed to Paul in a dream that a storm was coming. Paul, the prisoner, told his captors that if they kept going they would encounter a terrible storm. Paul had been shipwrecked before. He knew the risks. He had experienced storms. He knew the outcome was always uncertain, but the Centurion in charge ignored Paul's advice. So Paul said, **Keep up your courage for I have faith in God that it will happen just as God told me. Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island.**" (Acts 27:25-26) The good news is you are not going to die. The bad news is the boat that has been carrying you, this vessel that has taken you from port to port, place to place, the strong and stable boat that made you feel safe on the water – the boat will be lost. They were not going to lose their lives, but they were going to lose the boat. Which is no small matter – to lose the boat is to lose everything that kept you afloat. You may lose everything – your boat, your house, your job, your most defining relationship, even your health – and still not lose you – still not lose your faith. "Keep up your courage for I have faith in God..."

How not to survive a shipwreck: Thinking we are in charge of our lives. Leaving no space for God, we cling to life. Only when our hands are too weak to cling to life anymore, because of sickness, death, addiction, failure – too weak to manage on our own, that's when we find life. Help is on the way! You don't survive a shipwreck on your own. The only way you have of saving yourself is to let someone outside of you do the saving.

That's the ending to Paul's shipwreck story. A curious thing happened. The boat came to a stop on rocks but the relentless beating of the waves began tearing the boat to pieces. This was the shipwreck that Paul warned about. And, in their panic, the soldiers realized what would happen to them if the prisoners escaped. The soldiers would be killed. "So wouldn't it better to kill the prisoners than to let them escape?" But at that moment, a most unlikely thing happened – sometimes God works in ways we don't expect, through people we don't expect: The Roman centurion in charge gave a different order. Those who can swim should swim and those who can't should grab a plank and all 276 gasp and splash their way to shore – all have been saved. When your ship goes under, you need people in your life who will stay with you and even carry you.

I had my lifesaving certification and so one summer I was the lifeguard at camp and the first rule for the campers: don't go into the water alone. You need a buddy. And every few minutes, I would blow a whistle – "buddy up." And every child would stop what they were doing and look for their buddy and grab his or her hand. It was a matter of life or death, and we didn't want to lose anyone.

Last Sunday was a vacation day for me. Later I was able to watch our worship online. But that morning, Amanda, our daughter Bethany, and I joined a large crowd of people at the Stonearch

Bridge in downtown Minneapolis for their annual art show. And as we were walking down the street filled with people, suddenly a child, not more than four years of age was standing in the midst of the crowd, crying hysterically – and everyone stopped. Somehow her Dad looked one direction and the child another and they had become separated and in a crowd of strangers, she panicked – “Where’s my daddy?” That’s when the crowd stopped – everyone around her wanted to find her daddy – one person crouched down at her level to bring comfort and other shouted, “Where’s her daddy?” This was a shipwreck moment, and everyone wanted her to know that help was on the way. And within seconds, her daddy was there to take her hand.

In the past week our nation had a similar moment [photo]. This little girl crying at the border became a symbol of what’s been happening to the children who are caught up in this nation’s struggle with immigration. I don’t really know what to do about immigration. I’m not smart enough to figure that out. I’m not really interested in the politics around all of this. But what I know is when a child is crying – when there is a panicked cry from a child separated from mommy or daddy – Don’t we want to be the ones to say to her and to every child in fear and pain – help is on the way? There appeared to be a course change last week. And it will be important for us not to be distracted or to lose interest, but to insure that the cries of the children continue to be heard and that the help they need is truly on the way.

That’s what we do here. We become the help that is on the way – when we realized there were children in this neighborhood that needed childcare but parents did not have a safe place with love and compassion to care for them. 18 years ago this week we open our doors for the sake of the children. It’s also why we keep expanding Bloom Early Learning and Child Care – because the cries are still being heard and we are saying – help is on the way. It’s why we just started a weekend food program that you have funded. It’s why people showed up last Thursday afternoon to prepare the Totes for Hope. Help is on the way. It’s why we are providing the granola bars for Oakwood’s summer school – there are children in this school district who do not have enough, but so we do not single them out, we are providing snacks for all the children. Help is on the way. We’ve done that in Jamaica and Bolivia, and doing that today in Kenya. It’s why we are providing every child at Messiah with a prayer partner. Help is on the way. That’s why we do here.

Years ago, I had my own catalytic moment when our four year old Lauren and I were walking through what then was Dayton’s department store at Southdale, and somehow we became separated. And I was frantic to find her. How would I explain to Amanda that I lost our daughter, and would I ever see Lauren again – maybe you’ve been in that place – either with your own child – or with one of life’s shipwreck moment – how will I get through this or how will this person I care about get through this. And in my moment of panic, there was an announcement – a little girl with curly hair has lost her dad and is waiting at the cosmetic counter. And as I got close to that cosmetic counter, she saw me and ran to me and said, “Daddy, I knew that you would come.”

Each week we come here, the rescued – rescued by a God who has never let go of us – each week we come here to renew our lifesaving certificates so that we can proclaim to the world – Help is on the way.

Grow, Pray, Study for Week of June 24, 2018

Weekly Prayer: Eternal God, be for us the calm that can still the storms of life. Be for us the strength that can endure the unknown and lead us to places of safety and rest. Help us to be

like your servant, Paul. No matter what life asked of him, he answered in faith. Help us to seek You so that we can be sanctuaries of love and hope in a hurting world. Amen.

Monday, June 25

Scripture: Isaiah 26:1-4

On that day, this song will be sung in the land of Judah: Ours is a strong city! God makes salvation its walls and ramparts. Open the gates and let a righteous nation enter, a nation that keeps faith. Those with sound thoughts you will keep in peace, in peace because they trust in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD is a rock for all ages.

Observation: If ever there was a shipwreck that questioned whether an entire nation would survive, it was what happened to the nation of Israel in 586 B.C. One hundred thirty-six years earlier, the Northern Kingdom had been destroyed by the Persian Empire. It would not rebuild. The nation was lost forever. But the people in the Southern Kingdom felt the same fate would never happen to them. God was on their side! (Or so they thought) But in 586, the Babylonian army brought death and destruction beyond anything the people of Israel imagined possible. And the survivors were forcibly removed from their country. It was as if they were shipwrecked and left stranded on a desert island. But they never lost one important thing: Hope.

Application: The prophet Isaiah went into exile with the people of Israel. He sang a song of hope: "Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD is a rock for all ages." When have you experienced a "shipwreck" time in life when you felt lost and deserted? Was there a song that rescued you or gave you hope? Maybe it was literally a song – or was it something else? What song could you "sing" to someone you know who feels shipwrecked?

Prayer: O Jesus, Savior, come close. Listen to the cries of my heart. Calm my anxious heart, then use me to be a calming presence in someone's life. Plant a song in my heart that will remind me of the hope found in you. Amen.

Tuesday, June 26

Scripture: Acts 9:10-19

In Damascus there was a certain disciple named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, "Ananias!" He answered, "Yes, Lord." The Lord instructed him, "Go to Judas' house on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias enter and put his hands on him to restore his sight." Ananias countered, "Lord, I have heard many reports about this man. People say he has done horrible things to your holy people in Jerusalem. He's here with authority from the chief priests to arrest everyone who calls on your name." The Lord replied, "Go! This man is the agent I have chosen to carry my name before Gentiles, kings, and Israelites. I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." Ananias went to the house. He placed his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord sent me—Jesus, who appeared to you on the way as you were coming here. He sent me so that you could see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Instantly, flakes fell from Saul's eyes and he could see again. He got up and was baptized. After eating, he regained his strength. He stayed with the disciples in Damascus for several days.

Observation: Paul's (Saul's) life had suddenly been turned upside down. On the road to Damascus to terrorize and kill Christians, he encountered the risen Jesus (whom Paul knew was dead) and left blind. But then Jesus called a disciple named Ananias to go and minister to Paul. Jesus had prepared Paul to receive Ananias, but Ananias knew he was being asked to

approach the one person who wanted him dead. "Lord, send somebody else!" But Ananias went and through Ananias, God restored sight (physically and spiritually) to Paul.

Application: What kind of courage did it take for Ananias to step into a moment of danger, to put his life on the line, because he felt God was calling? This was more than stepping outside his comfort zone. Ananias put himself in a place of risk to be the help that God was providing to Ananias' enemy (Paul/Saul). When have you been aware of a need and thought, "send someone else"? When have you been aware of a need and you became the help that someone needed?

Prayer: God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

Wednesday, June 27

Scripture: Acts 25:9-12, 26:1-32

Festus, wanting to put the Jews in his debt, asked Paul, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem to stand trial before me concerning these things?" Paul replied, "I'm standing before Caesar's court. I ought to be tried here. I have done nothing wrong to the Jews, as you well know. If I'm guilty and have done something that deserves death, then I won't try to avoid death. But if there is nothing to their accusations against me, no one has the authority to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!" After Festus conferred with his advisors, he responded, "You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go."

Agrippa said to Paul, "You may speak for yourself." So Paul gestured with his hand and began his defense. "King Agrippa, I consider myself especially fortunate that I stand before you today as I offer my defense concerning all the accusations the Jews have brought against me. This is because you understand well all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I ask you to listen to me patiently. Every Jew knows the way of life I have followed since my youth because, from the beginning, I was among my people and in Jerusalem. They have known me for a long time. If they wanted to, they could testify that I followed the way of life set out by the most exacting group of our religion. I am a Pharisee. Today I am standing trial because of the hope in the promise God gave our ancestors. This is the promise our twelve tribes hope to receive as they earnestly worship night and day. The Jews are accusing me, King Agrippa, because of this hope! Why is it inconceivable to you that God raises the dead? "I really thought that I ought to oppose the name of Jesus the Nazarene in every way possible. And that's exactly what I did in Jerusalem. I locked up many of God's holy people in prison under the authority of the chief priests. When they were condemned to death, I voted against them. In one synagogue after another—indeed, in all the synagogues—I would often torture them, compelling them to slander God. My rage bordered on the hysterical as I pursued them, even to foreign cities. "On one such journey, I was going to Damascus with the full authority of the chief priests. While on the road at midday, King Agrippa, I saw a light from heaven shining around me and my traveling companions. That light was brighter than the sun. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice that said to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why are you harassing me? It's hard for you to kick against a spear.' Then I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' The Lord replied, 'I am Jesus, whom you are harassing. Get up! Stand on your feet! I have appeared to you for this purpose: to appoint you as my servant and witness of what you have seen and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to open their eyes. Then they can turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, and receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are made holy by faith in me.' "So, King Agrippa, I wasn't disobedient to that heavenly vision. Instead, I proclaimed first to those in Damascus and

Jerusalem, then to the whole region of Judea and to the Gentiles. My message was that they should change their hearts and lives and turn to God, and that they should demonstrate this change in their behavior. Because of this, some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to murder me. God has helped me up to this very day. Therefore, I stand here and bear witness to the lowly and the great. I'm saying nothing more than what the Prophets and Moses declared would happen: that the Christ would suffer and that, as the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to my people and to the Gentiles." At this point in Paul's defense, Festus declared with a loud voice, "You've lost your mind, Paul! Too much learning is driving you mad!" But Paul replied, "I'm not mad, most honorable Festus! I'm speaking what is sound and true. King Agrippa knows about these things, and I have been speaking openly to him. I'm certain that none of these things have escaped his attention. This didn't happen secretly or in some out-of-the-way place. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do." Agrippa said to Paul, "Are you trying to convince me that, in such a short time, you've made me a Christian?" Paul responded, "Whether it is a short or a long time, I pray to God that not only you but also all who are listening to me today will become like me, except for these chains." The king stood up, as did the governor, Bernice, and those sitting with them. As they left, they were saying to each other, "This man is doing nothing that deserves death or imprisonment." Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been released if he hadn't appealed to Caesar."

Observation: Paul stayed in Roman custody for two years, safe from plotters (cf. Acts 24). Then a new Roman governor, Porcius Festus, saw it as good politics to please the Jewish leaders by sending Paul back to Jerusalem. But that journey still risked ambush. Paul, born in Tarsus and therefore a Roman citizen, used his legal right to appeal to Caesar. This assured him a trip to Rome under Roman protection (albeit as a prisoner). His strong testimony to Jesus triggered strong reactions in Festus and King Agrippa (a great-grandson of Herod the Great).

Application: Paul's final journey showed God using Paul's training as a Pharisee, his Roman citizenship by birth, and his passionate Christian witness—a strikingly unique set of attributes that Peter, John or James would not have had. What qualities do you bring to your service for God that may allow you to serve in ways others might not be able to?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, as I read this story, I'm not sure I could carry out the hugely challenging mission you gave Paul. But I do ask that you'll guide me and strengthen me to do the tasks you set before me each day. Amen.

Thursday, June 28

Scripture: Acts 27:1-2, 27-44

When it was determined that we were to sail to Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were placed in the custody of a centurion named Julius of the Imperial Company. We boarded a ship from Adramyttium that was about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia. So we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, came with us.

On the fourteenth night, we were being carried across the Adriatic Sea. Around midnight the sailors began to suspect that land was near. They dropped a weighted line to take soundings and found the water to be about one hundred twenty feet deep. After proceeding a little farther, we took soundings again and found the water to be about ninety feet deep. Afraid that we might run aground somewhere on the rocks, they hurled out four anchors from the stern and began to pray for daylight. The sailors tried to abandon the ship by lowering the lifeboat into the sea, pretending they were going to lower anchors from the bow. Paul said to the centurion and his soldiers, "Unless they stay in the ship, you can't be saved from peril." The soldiers then cut the

ropes to the lifeboat and let it drift away. Just before daybreak, Paul urged everyone to eat. He said, "This is the fourteenth day you've lived in suspense, and you've not had even a bite to eat. I urge you to take some food. Your health depends on it. None of you will lose a single hair from his head." After he said these things, he took bread, gave thanks to God in front of them all, then broke it and began to eat. Everyone was encouraged and took some food. (In all, there were two hundred seventy-six of us on the ship.) When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea. In the morning light they saw a bay with a sandy beach. They didn't know what land it was, but they thought they might possibly be able to run the ship aground. They cut the anchors loose and left them in the sea. At the same time, they untied the ropes that ran back to the rudders. They raised the foresail to catch the wind and made for the beach. But they struck a sandbar and the ship ran aground. The bow was stuck and wouldn't move, and the stern was broken into pieces by the force of the waves. The soldiers decided to kill the prisoners to keep them from swimming to shore and escaping. However, the centurion wanted to save Paul, so he stopped them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and head for land. He ordered the rest to grab hold of planks or debris from the ship. In this way, everyone reached land safely.

Observation: Here they were having survived the storm, being shipwrecked, and the soldiers were ready to kill the prisoners. Never mind that these same prisoners (with Paul among them) saved the soldiers from disaster, spending months together at sea. They were Roman soldiers, and they knew that their punishment for losing prisoners would be death. But one man, the centurion, said "No." There was something greater than the law. He stood up to what the law demanded, and as a result, "everyone reached land safely."

Application: Just when it appeared that they had survived the storm and the shipwreck, Paul's life is on the line. Consider the risk that God was taking. God entrusted Paul into the hands of Roman soldiers who were sworn to kill when there was a risk that Paul might escape. When the Centurion "saved" Paul, everyone was saved. Could one person's act of rescue end up saving everyone? Isn't that what God has done in Jesus? What could God do through you?

Prayer: Jesus, Savior, rescue me once more. Help me to know that you have been sent alongside me to rescue me and to save me for all eternity. Use me as a living message to rescue those around me who have yet to experience your lifesaving message. Amen.

Friday, June 29

Scripture: Acts 28:1-16; Philippians 1:12-26

After reaching land safely, we learned that the island was called Malta. The islanders showed us extraordinary kindness. Because it was rainy and cold, they built a fire and welcomed all of us. Paul gathered a bunch of dry sticks and put them on the fire. As he did, a poisonous snake, driven out by the heat, latched on to his hand. When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, "This man must be a murderer! He was rescued from the sea, but the goddess Justice hasn't let him live!" Paul shook the snake into the fire and suffered no harm. They expected him to swell up with fever or suddenly drop dead. After waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and began to claim that he was a god. Publius, the island's most prominent person, owned a large estate in that area. He welcomed us warmly into his home as his guests for three days. Publius' father was bedridden, sick with a fever and dysentery. Paul went to see him and prayed. He placed his hand on him and healed him. Once this happened, the rest of the sick on the island came to him

and were healed. They honored us in many ways. When we were getting ready to sail again, they supplied us with what we needed.

After three months we put out to sea in a ship that had spent the winter at the island. It was an Alexandrian ship with carvings of the twin gods Castor and Pollux as its figurehead. We landed in Syracuse where we stayed three days. From there we sailed to Rhegium. After one day a south wind came up, and we arrived on the second day in Puteoli. There we found brothers and sisters who urged us to stay with them for a week. In this way we came to Rome. When the brothers and sisters there heard about us, they came as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. When Paul saw them, he gave thanks to God and was encouraged. When we entered Rome, Paul was permitted to live by himself, with a soldier guarding him.

Brothers and sisters, I want you to know that the things that have happened to me have actually advanced the gospel. The whole Praetorian Guard and everyone else knows that I'm in prison for Christ. Most of the brothers and sisters have had more confidence through the Lord to speak the word boldly and bravely because of my jail time. Some certainly preach Christ with jealous and competitive motives, but others preach with good motives. They are motivated by love, because they know that I'm put here to give a defense of the gospel; the others preach Christ because of their selfish ambition. They are insincere, hoping to cause me more pain while I'm in prison. What do I think about this? Just this: since Christ is proclaimed in every possible way, whether from dishonest or true motives, I'm glad and I'll continue to be glad. I'm glad because I know that this will result in my release through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. It is my expectation and hope that I won't be put to shame in anything. Rather, I hope with daring courage that Christ's greatness will be seen in my body, now as always, whether I live or die. Because for me, living serves Christ and dying is even better. If I continue to live in this world, I get results from my work. But I don't know what I prefer. I'm torn between the two because I want to leave this life and be with Christ, which is far better. However, it's more important for me to stay in this world for your sake. I'm sure of this: I will stay alive and remain with all of you to help your progress and the joy of your faith, and to increase your pride in Christ Jesus through my presence when I visit you again.

Observation: Sent off to Rome on a Mediterranean sailing ship, yesterday we read Paul's experience of being shipwrecked. Paul and his guards wintered on the island of Malta. The next spring, when he reached Rome, a company of Christians welcomed him. From Rome (Philippians 4:22), Paul wrote to the Christians in Philippi about his God-based confidence, both in life and in death.

Application: Paul had never been to Rome, yet as he arrived, Luke wrote, "the brothers and sisters there heard about us, [and] they came as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us." Imagine the flood of satisfied joy reflected in the words, "When Paul saw them, he gave thanks to God and was encouraged." When have you seen the time and effort you invested in others make a difference, perhaps larger than you ever dreamed? In what people or godly causes are you currently investing?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you taught Paul how to treasure every moment of this earthly life, and to use it for you, without fearing its inevitable end. Help me to keep growing into that attitude toward all the parts of your gift of life. Amen.

Saturday, June 30

Scripture: Acts 28:17-31

Three days later, Paul called the Jewish leaders together. When they gathered, he said, "Brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors, I'm a prisoner from Jerusalem. They handed me over to the Romans, who intended to release me after they examined me, because they couldn't find any reason for putting me to death. When the Jews objected, I was forced to appeal to Caesar. Don't think I appealed to Caesar because I had any reason to bring charges against my nation. This is why I asked to see you and speak with you: it's because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain." They responded, "We haven't received any letters about you from Judea, nor have any of our brothers come and reported or said anything bad about you. But we think it's important to hear what you think, for we know that people everywhere are speaking against this faction." On the day scheduled for this purpose, many people came to the place where he was staying. From morning until evening, he explained and testified concerning God's kingdom and tried to convince them about Jesus through appealing to the Law from Moses and the Prophets. Some were persuaded by what he said, but others refused to believe. They disagreed with each other and were starting to leave when Paul made one more statement: "The Holy Spirit spoke correctly when he said to your ancestors through Isaiah the prophet, Go to this people and say: You will hear, to be sure, but never understand; and you will certainly see but never recognize what you are seeing. This people's senses have become calloused, and they've become hard of hearing, and they've shut their eyes so that they won't see with their eyes or hear with their ears or understand with their minds, and change their hearts and lives that I may heal them. "Therefore, be certain of this: God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles. They will listen!"

Paul lived in his own rented quarters for two full years and welcomed everyone who came to see him. Unhindered and with complete confidence, he continued to preach God's kingdom and to teach about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Observation: Paul reached out to the Jewish leaders in Rome. As in most other places, he got at best a mixed reaction. He quoted Isaiah 6:9-10, and told them that salvation was also going to the Gentiles. Based on Acts 28:20, and Paul's earlier embrace of the Pharisees' belief in the idea of resurrection, Jesus' resurrection must have been central to his appeal. He probably used language much like that in chapter 15 of his letter to Christians in Corinth.

Application: Why did Paul speak to the Jewish leaders in Rome? Hadn't he learned by now that that wasn't likely to work? For Paul, this was personal. In his letter to Rome (written before he ever got to that city), Paul wrote, "My heart's desire is for Israel's salvation. That's my prayer to God for them" (Romans 10:1). Are there people you care about that you're tempted to give up on, who just aren't going to share your faith? How can Paul's example encourage you to keep seeking loving ways to share?

Prayer: O Jesus, you walked into the darkest, deepest place we face—into death itself—and then you emerged, alive and victorious. Thank you for winning that victory, which I could never have won for myself, and then sharing it with me. Amen.