

Letting the Lifeboat Go

Acts 27 records the apostle Paul's travel to Rome as a prisoner, the storm that would hit his voyage and his subsequent shipwreck on the island of Malta. Paul had shared with the fearful men that God has told him that all would survive the storm, though all would experience shipwreck. Under the pretence of lowering an anchor, the fearful soldiers started to lower the lifeboat in the hope that their own strength and skill would allow them to reach shore. Paul told them that they would all be saved *if they stayed on the ship*. They were to ride the storm out, trusting in God's promise to Paul, rather than take matters into their own hands. They did as he said: '*Some soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it fall away*' (V: 3).

There you are in the middle of a raging storm with a lifeboat in sight. What does our human nature tell us? It won't be an easy task but you might be better taking the risk of trying to escape by using all your own skill, strength and sheer determination to survive and beat the storm, rather than trusting that God will take you through it? The former relies on you, the latter on God. What storm are you experiencing now? Perhaps you seem to be in an everlasting storm since being abused. Does a storm of negative thoughts and behaviour patterns; a host of practical, financial, relationship problems seem to define your life? Perhaps you thought the storm had died down but now you are right in the middle of one that appears the Perfect Storm in every sense of its apparently destructive force. Are you inclined to take matters into your own hands despite knowing that God wants you to *wait on Him*? Our sinful nature dictates a sense of independence from God: 'I can deal with it'. 'I want to deal with it in my way and in my time'. Some of us may struggle more with a want to take things into our own hands than others. We want to chase the lifeboat and trust in our own abilities to escape rather than waiting in the storm for God to decide *when* and indeed *if* we reach calmer waters.

God kept His promise to Paul: they all survived the storm and shipwreck. The latter no doubt brought great fear but God had decreed that they experience it. On broken pieces of ship, the men and Paul safely landed where God had intended. I'm always looking for the nearest lifeboat-one that *I* consider strong enough to take me to safety, when *I* think it's time to abandon ship and one that *I* always want to steer. I am slowly learning, however, that sometimes we need those storms and even the shipwrecks that follow to know God even more as we trust in Him, not to rescue us when we think He should, but instead to be with us in the storms and during the fears, frustration and distress of possible and actual shipwrecks. As believers, surely the main direction of our lives is to know Christ more and more deeply (Philippians 3:8-10). Next time we find ourselves in the midst of a raging sea and we run for the man made lifeboat, we should stop and pray for the faith that recalls how God commands those waves, he commands the direction of our ships and the place where on its broken pieces we may land. Next time we find ourselves in the midst of a raging sea and we run for the man made boat, we should stop and pray for the faith that recalls how the only true lifeboat that can set us free within such storms is Christ himself.