

Derek French:

In recent programmes we've followed Paul from when he was wrongly arrested in Jerusalem right through to his trial in Caesarea and his appeal to Caesar.

Appealing to Caesar meant he had to be taken to Rome, and it's the details of that journey which we're going to cover in this programme.

We've the help of Gerard and Phillippa Chrispin again, and Phillippa will read the details for us from Acts 27, verses 1-26 and then Gerard will take us through them.

Phillippa Chrispin:

*'And when it was decided that we should sail to Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to one named Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment. So, entering a ship of Adramyttium, we put to sea, meaning to sail along the coasts of Asia. Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us. And the next day we landed at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him liberty to go to his friends and receive care.'*

*'When we had put to sea from there, we sailed under the shelter of Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. And when we had sailed over the sea which is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy, and he put us on board.'*

*'When we had sailed slowly many days, and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, the wind not permitting us to proceed, we sailed under the shelter of Crete off Salmone. Passing it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea.'*

*'Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, saying, "Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives." Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul. And because the harbour was not suitable to winter in, the majority advised to set sail from there also, if by any means they could reach Phoenix, a harbour of Crete opening toward the southwest and northwest, and winter there.'*

*'When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete. But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon. So when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let her drive. And running under the shelter of an island called Clauda, we secured the skiff with difficulty. When they had taken it on board, they used cables to undergird the ship; and fearing lest they should run aground on the Syrtis Sands, they struck sail and so were driven. And because we were exceedingly tempest-tossed, the next day they lightened the ship. On the third day we threw the ship's tackle overboard with our own hands. Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up.'*

*'But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss. And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.' Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. However, we must run aground on a certain island.'"*

Gerard Chrispin:

Paul and some other prisoners are handed over to Julius, a centurion of the Augustine regiment or cohort. That regiment operates to accompany high profile prisoners of various kinds, including Paul.

Julius is a humane, kind and reasonable military officer. He probably knows Paul's background well and gives him as much liberty as he can. When not at sea he allows the apostle to visit his friends and be cared for. That tells you a lot about how Paul is regarded as a trustworthy prisoner. If he escaped, Julius could lose his own life and certainly his career would be ruined. So for him to let Paul have such a measure of freedom speaks volumes of Paul's honourable reliability and of Julius' wise and kind nature.

Luke joins Paul, Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, is with them too. Christians who are just there to support and to be trusted in awkward situations are to be valued highly. They often enable Christians with a high profile in God's work to serve the Lord better.

The centurion arranges passage on a ship based in Adramyttium. Sailing for 70 miles from Caesarea, this ship calls at Sidon, where Julius first allows Paul to see friends on shore. They continue close to Cyprus to avoid strong winds and follow the coastline round to Myra in the province of Lycia. Julius, a centurion, now negotiates a passage on an Alexandrian ship bound for Italy.

A slow start means this vessel takes many days to arrive off Cnidus and then to sail under the shelter of Crete to the southwest. The condition means the ship passes by Crete with difficulty, until it comes to dock at Fair Havens, halfway down the southern coast. Much time is spent harboured in Fair Havens. Sailing is extremely dangerous between the middle of September and the middle of November. The fact that the fast, the Day of Atonement, is already over means we are now probably into October.

Paul, himself a seasoned sailor, strongly advises wintering in Fair Havens to avoid disaster and loss of cargo, ship and the lives of those who sail. The owner of the ship and its pilot advise Julius to leave Fair Havens because they deem its harbour unsuitable to winter in. The majority view is against Paul. It often is, for other reasons. Understandably, but wrongly in the event, Julius favours the nautical experts' opinion over that of a Christian preacher. They decide they will sail and slowly follow the coastline to Phoenix to winter there.

The ship does set sail for the short trip to Phoenix. All is going well, the south wind blows softly; wind enough to fill the sail, soft enough to cause no problems. Perhaps the sailors now snigger at Paul. They think they will soon be there, safe and sound. It's as good as done, the majority was right! But was it?

Then it hits them. A tempestuous wind called Euroclydon strikes them head on, stirring up huge waves. This strong north-easterly head wind replaces a southwest gentle blow. Unable to make any progress towards Phoenix, the sailors let the ship be driven by the wind and waves.

They have some relief as they are forced under the shelter of a small island, Clauda, just to the south of Crete. They are there long enough to pull in the skiff that has been in tow and use the ships cables and ropes kept on board to undergird the ship. But now they fear running onto the dreaded Syrtis Sands where ships have run aground before and lives have been lost. So they strike sail. It seems that operation also involves dropping an anchor to slow the ship down. Still they are tempest tossed.

Unnecessary equipment and cargo are jettisoned. The ship's tackle goes overboard on the third day. Hopelessness sets in. For many days the glowering sky is so cloudy and dark that they see neither sun nor stars and the tempest continues unabated. All these lead to the sad conclusion: all hope that we would be saved was finally given up. That soft south wind blowing them out of Fair Havens now seems a very long time ago.

One of my abiding memories as a young, cricket-mad Yorkshire lad was seeing a photo of arguably the best opening batsman in the world, Yorkshire's Len Hutton, and his very reliable and capable fellow opener, the Lancastrian Cyril Washbrook. The words underneath the photo were, 'The men for the crisis.' Since that day I have always appreciated any man or woman for a crisis. Paul is such a man, by God's saving and sustaining grace. When all hope has gone from those who out voted him about embarking on this disastrous voyage, which they intended to be short but which will end in parts of their broken ship being washed up on Malta, Paul stands in the midst of them and speaks.

He cannot resist an 'I told you so!' comment to start, but hopefully that will make them listen more carefully to him now. He tells them to 'take heart', and then tells them why. They will not lose their lives, though the ship will be lost. How does he know?

He is an apostle to whom God makes himself known in special ways. That night, God has done exactly that through an angel. Paul makes it very clear to all that he belongs to God and that he serves him. The Lord, whom this man for the crisis knows and serves, is in charge of every crisis. God has told Paul that he must be brought before Caesar. He cannot do that unless he survives the impending ship wreck and gets to Rome.

But the angel also says something that shows that the apostle has been praying for his fellow travellers. The angel says, 'God has granted you all those who sail with you.' He has been granted them by God because he has prayed they will be spared, so Paul encourages them with, 'Therefore take heart, men.' He then affirms his unshakeable faith in God, which he has received through his personal faith in Jesus Christ. 'I believe God that it will be just as it was told me.' He lets them know that we all can trust what God says. We still can today, through the Bible. He tells them what will happen as they are rescued from a watery grave. 'We must run aground on a certain island.' Malta now beckons.

When things go wrong around you and people are in despair and fear, are you able to lift others by the way you live and speak for Christ and by your prayers? Is your faith in Christ so firm that you can identify with

what Paul wrote later to the church in Rome, *'and we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are 'the called', according to his purpose.'*

God makes no mistakes, and if we are in his hands, we can trust him.