

CONTAGIOUS—SHARING JESUS/GOING VIRAL

Contagious Faith in the Midst of the Storm

Acts 27:18-38, 42-44

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LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/contagious-faith-in-the-midst-of-the-storm/>

Most of us who are followers of Jesus live in a bubble. We only hang out with people who believe as we do. The Apostle Paul, on the other hand, hung out with all kinds. Paul had been a persecutor of Christians shortly after Jesus' resurrection and was powerfully converted to Christ. He was comfortable living his faith in front of sailors or Roman soldiers. The great Reformer John Calvin once wrote that God has a lot to teach us through the eyes of a nonbeliever. So true! And we don't become contagious in sharing our faith if we never learn and stay in the bubble.

Last February, I was privileged to visit Israel and our first stop was here, at Caesarea by the Sea, where Paul had been imprisoned by Festus, until he could be transported to stand before Caesar in Rome, to appeal the trumped-up charges against him. HERE IS A MAP OF THAT JOURNEY BY SEA. It was a long journey by ship (1,400 miles by land; and we think the trip took several months, from around late 60 AD to 61 AD). A violent Nor'easter came and enveloped them on the Mediterranean Sea. For days and days, no sun, no stars (v. 20). The heavenly bodies were their only navigational tools.

As the storm raged, Paul stood up and said to cheer up, an angel had appeared to him and told him they would survive (vv. 22-26). Don't you imagine those hard-bitten sailors and soldiers were thinking, "Cheer up? Really?" But Paul didn't just talk to them about other-worldly things. He also said to them, "You all need to eat!" (v. 33). To be a Christian witness is not just talking to people about going to heaven. It is to care about this life's needs. There is only one reason sailors and soldiers, very secular people would not laugh Paul off the ship for talking about odd stuff like angels and God speaking. That's because they sensed he cared about them.

In the movie, "Walk the Line," a bio pic about singer Johnny Cash, there is a scene in which the young, unknown Cash is auditioning in a studio, singing a gospel song in a lackluster manner. The producer gets irate, stops the song and shouts, "Sing something you believe! You don't believe what you're singing and I can tell it!" Here's a hint: the world can tell if we mean it!

But Paul wasn't worried about being laughed at. And that's precisely why they did NOT laugh at him! Somehow, those crusty old sailors and soldiers respected Paul. And they respected him. Now, we don't like being laughed at. We're always afraid people will laugh at us if we stand up for our faith. We as respectable American adults wouldn't want to appear foolish, would we? WE WOULD NEVER DRESS UP LIKE THIS, WOULD WE? OR THIS? We never dress up in strange NFL face paint, right? Or Mardi Gras attire? No. We're respectable!

And then Paul does something else. In the midst of all the profanity, hopelessness and pending death, Paul pauses and blesses the food they are going to eat, offering the traditional Jewish meal blessing (v. 33). And get this. The word is *eucharistesen*, from which we get our word eucharist. No, it wasn't a literal communion service, but notice how our quiet courage opens up space for

the living Christ to be real to people, even people who don't know him. Was Paul a good influence? The next verse says they were all encouraged.

Notice how, during the storm, Paul, though a prisoner, takes charge. The captive becomes the captain! Do you hear how Paul shared his faith? He basically said, "Is your way of life working for you now, in the storm? Because I've got hope even if the worst happens. My Lord is above the storm." A Kairos Prison Ministry worker once told me about an atheist offender who grudgingly barked, "Why should I come to Bible study? I don't believe in God." Ken, the prison ministry worker, replied, "Have you had one positive experience in here?" "No," the offender replied grudgingly. "Would you like to?" The atheist answered, "Yes." He came to the study and over time, gave his life to Christ. The worker was basically saying what Paul was: How's your life without God working during this storm?

I can imagine a few years after this episode of Paul's voyage, two sailors sitting in a pub somewhere in Crete. One says, "You know these Christ-followers really bug me. They're all crazy. It's just superstition and empty talk." The other one sips his beer thoughtfully and responds, "I'm not so sure. Let me tell you a story about a shipwreck and the strangest dude I ever met...I've never been able to get him out of my mind. Let me tell you about it..."