



God's Providence in Difficult Times

Acts 27

1. Sailing (verses 1-12)
2. Storm (verses 13-38)
3. Shipwreck (verses 39-44)
4. Safe (verse 44)

One of the most well-known and well-loved songs in all of Christendom is "Amazing Grace." It was written by John Newton, the former slave trader, who was saved to become a great pastor. His words echos in the minds of many:

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now I'm found,
Was blind but now I see.

We know these words well. They talk of God's grace in our lives. to save us from our sinful state. not because of what we had done, but because of God's kindness and mercy toward us in his grace. But are you familiar with the following stanza?

Through many dangers, toils, and snares
I have already come.
'Tis grace hath bro't me safe the far,
And grace will lead me home.

This stanza says that God's grace doesn't merely come upon us to save us. This stanza says that God's grace permeates the life of a believer, to guide him (or her), throughout his (or her) life, and especially through the "dangers, toils, and snares" of life. When trials and hardships and difficulties come upon our lives, we need to rest and rely upon the grace of God. We see this illustrated in our text this morning: Acts 27.

Acts 17 is basically a captain's log of Paul's journey across the Mediterranean Sea from Caesarea, on his way to Rome. The text is filled with nautical references and sailing terminology. It tells a thrilling and exciting story, of a ship navigating through dangerous waters. It tells of a storm that comes upon the ship, and it ends in a shipwreck, with all lives on the boat saved.

It's quite a story! But one must ask, "why is this chapter in the Bible?" "Why did Luke, the author of the book of Acts, decide that all of these details would be important for us to know?" "Was it merely to give us a nice story?" "Or did Luke include it for a purpose?" I believe that there was a purpose in mind. Luke's purpose is to further confirm to us, the providence of God, to fulfill what he had promised.

The book of Acts, in the largest sense is a book to show Jesus coming true on his promise to build his church. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus declared to Peter, "I will build my church." The book of Acts simply informs us of how Jesus does this. Jesus builds his church through his Spirit empowering people to be bold with others in giving witness to who Jesus is. This is the theme of the book of Acts, "Be My Witnesses." This is the method by which Jesus uses to build his church.

Do you remember when Jesus was leaving from his disciples? He told them "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This is what we have seen in the book of Acts. The Holy Spirit came upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost (as recorded in Acts, chapter 2). The disciples were witnesses in Jerusalem for a few years, until the martyrdom of Stephen scattered them abroad. The disciples were first witnesses in Judea and Samaria, those regions to the north and south of Jerusalem. From there, the book of Acts expands. with Peter bringing the gospel to the Gentiles in Caesarea, and then with Paul bringing the gospel "to the end of the earth" through his missionary journeys.

Now, at the end of the book of Acts, we Paul, headed to Rome. This was not only Paul's plan, but it was also the promise of God. Before we actually consider our text, look back let's remind ourselves of Acts 19:21. Paul was in Ephesus, and considering his next steps in his ministry.

Acts 19:21

Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying,
"After I have been there, I must also see Rome."

As you work through Acts, you see Paul on this very journey. He passed through Macedonia and Achaia, landing in Jerusalem in Acts 21. While in Jerusalem, Paul was falsely accused by the Jews, spending a few years in prison, appearing before various trials and examinations in defending himself, and the only way to save his life was to appeal to Caesar. This is where we find Paul in Acts 27, on his way to stand before Caesar in Rome. Acts 27 takes us on this journey.

But note the three words in Acts 19:21 that show that this wasn't merely Paul's idea. Paul resolved these things "in the Spirit." I believe this to mean that the Spirit of God was working in his life to give him a divine itinerary in his life. and in Acts 27, we see God fulfilling the promise

that he made, that Paul would arrive in Rome safely.

If fact, if you turn over to Acts 23, we see Paul receiving a direct revelation from the Lord, that this will, indeed be the case. After being in danger for his life was brought into the Roman barracks for safety. We read, "The following night the Lord stood by [Paul] and said, 'Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome'" (Acts 19:21). We see here, not only Paul's determination to get to Rome (Acts 19:21), but God's confirmation that he will indeed arrive in Rome.

In Acts 27, we see the Lord coming true on his promises, to bring him safely to Rome. The title of my message this morning is "God's Providence in Difficult Times," because, that's what we see in this perilous journey in the sea. We see God working to bring Paul to Rome, just as he promised. Now, because the text is so long, I'm not going to read the entire chapter for you right now. Rather, we will work our way through it. My first point this morning begins in verse 1. I'm calling it,

1. Sailing (verses 1-12)

This is what we see Paul doing in these verses. In verses 1 and 2, we see Paul embarking on the ship.

Acts 27:1-2

And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort named Julius. And embarking in a ship of Adramyttium, which was about to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica.

Apparently, Festus, the governor, had decided that the best way for Paul and the other prisoners to travel to Rome was by ship, and not by land. Certainly, this would reduce the possibility of escape by the prisoners, and would be a secure way to transport them.

When arrangements were made, Paul and the other prisoners were placed upon this ship. They were placed in custody of a centurion named, "Julius." He is described as being of the "Augustan Cohort," which probably meant that he was based out of Rome, and had come to Caesarea on some sort of military assignment. but was now was returning to Rome, with Paul and "some other prisoners."

Now, we don't know the names of the prisoners, but we do know the names of some of Paul's traveling companions. Paul was "accompanied by Aristarchus." All that we are told about him is that he was "a Macedonian from Thessalonica." He was certainly a believer in Christ, perhaps converted through Paul's preaching ministry in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9).

We are told of a third traveling companion. Do you see it? Luke was with Paul as well. We know this because we read in verse 2, "We put out to sea." Luke, the author of the book of Acts, was with Paul during this sailing adventure.

The sort of ship is identified in verse 2 as being "a ship of Adramyttium," that is a commercial freighter that came from Adramyttium, a harbor city along the northwest coast of Asia Minor. For the ship was planning to "sail to the ports along the coast of Asia" (verse 2), picking up and trading cargo along the way. Verse 3 tells us the path the ship took on its journey.

Acts 27:3

The next day we put in at Sidon.

If you have a map in the back of your Bible, it would be good to look at it. In verse 2, the ship embarked from Caesarea. It headed north to Sidon. Every long journey begins with the first leg. and the first leg took them to Sidon. If winds were favorable, they could have made this journey in a day. Apparently, they spent some time here transferring cargo on and off the ship. In verse 3, we get a sense of how Paul was treated by Julius, the centurion.

Acts 27:3

... And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for.

This is the kindness of God. Paul didn't have to remain on the ship in his chains. Rather, he was given leave from the ship to visit with his friends on land. For sure, this came about because of Paul's character and reputation. Julius knew that he was a man who could be trusted. So, Paul was given leave. I'm sure that Paul's time was spent with those of the church in Sidon. Perhaps there were a few worship services. I'm sure that Paul had an opportunity to speak forth the gospel of Christ during his stay in Sidon.

Verse 4 picks up the journey, and this is where the journey begins its difficulty.

Acts 27:4-5

And putting out to sea from there we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were against us. And when we had sailed across the open sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia.

On the map, we see the route that the ship took on its way to Rome. Because of the prevailing winds from the west, they sailed "under the lee of Cyprus," that is, under the "sheltered" side of Cyprus, that is, along the eastern edge of the island. Then, they hugged the coast, until they arrived at Myra. At Myra, they transferred ships. Apparently, the Adramyttium ship was heading up to Adramyttium, as you might be able to locate on a map. But Paul and the prisoners were heading to Rome. So, we read in verse 6,

Acts 27:6-8

There [in Myra] the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy and put us on board. We sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, and as the wind did not allow us to go farther, we sailed under the lee of Crete off Salmone. Coasting along it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea.

It is here that we are introduced to the difficulty of the travel. Verse 7 tells us that it was only "with difficulty" that they arrived in Cnidus. The wind prevented them from "going farther." So, they sailed south, under the lee (that is, the shelter) of Crete, arriving at Fair Havens. Now, for us, this is a familiar name. "Fairhaven" is the name of a "Christian Retirement Center" in Rockford. What an appropriate name. "Fair Havens" is where Paul found safety from the winds. And "Fairhaven" is a place of safety for senior citizens in Rockford.

It was only "with difficulty" that they arrived in "Fair Havens." The difficulty of the contrary winds and weather continued on for many days. This is how it is on the sea. If the weather is bad, you don't go sailing. You wait. This is what the crew did at Fair Havens. they waited and waited. We don't know how long the wait was, only that "much time had passed" in their waiting. Paul sensed the danger.

Acts 27:9-10

Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, saying, "Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives."

The "fast" mentioned here in verse 9 is the fast of Yom Kippur, which often comes toward the end of September. As one commentator said, "In ancient times, sailing the high seas after September 15 was not advisable. By then, cloudy weather set in; the cloud cover made it impossible for seafarers to observe the stars, by which they navigated."^[1] That's why Paul said, "Let's stay here, lest we lose the ship and our lives!" the story continues in verse 11.

Acts 27:11

But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said.

This is almost humorous. Of course, you pay more attention to the pilot and the owners of the ship. They have more know-how. They have more at stake than the passengers.

Acts 27:12

And because the harbor was not suitable to spend the winter in, the majority decided to put out to sea from there, on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing both southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there.

If you have a map, note how far they were intending to go. It wasn't far. It was just across the island. But Phoenix was a suitable harbor for the winter. In those days, all seafaring ships stayed in port from mid-November to mid-March. But they never made it to Phoenix. This is because of the storm that came upon them. This leads us to our second point.

2. Storm (verses 13-38)

Acts 27:13-15

Now when the south wind blew gently, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close to the shore. But soon a tempestuous wind, called the northeaster, struck down from the land. And when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along.

As careful as they were, trying to stay close to shore, this "tempestuous wind" came upon them, taking them away from the land, and out to the sea.

Acts 27:16-17

Running under the lee of a small island called Cauda, we managed with difficulty to secure the ship's boat. After hoisting it up [the lifeboat], they used supports to undergird the ship. Then, fearing that they would run aground on the Syrtis, they lowered the gear, and thus they were driven along.

Again, we see the "difficulty" of their situation. With the relative protection of the small island of Cauda, they secured the lifeboat to the ship. And having done that, they tried to wrap the boat with ropes to secure it from the pounding it was taking. It's called frapping! It helps to keep the ship from breaking apart. They even lowered the anchor in attempts to secure the boat, somehow. But they were adrift in the sea, at the mercy of the storm. In verse 18, we read how bad the storm was.

Acts 27:18-20

Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo. And on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.

Though I have never been in a storm at sea, I have read that this is one of the most terrifying experiences that one can have. Even today, when such a storm hits, and you are out at sea, nobody can come and help you. With a satellite phone, you can dial 911 and talk with an emergency responder. But storms are so bad that planes and helicopters aren't going to help you. For them, it was so bad, that "all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned" (verse 20).

Now, in some regards, this is the best place for anyone to be. When people have lost all hope in this world, it's often then that they turn to God. This was the case with John Newton. He wrote, "Amazing Grace" that I referenced at the beginning of my message.

John Newton was a slave-trader. Though he had the privilege of a godly mother, who taught him the Scriptures, she died when he was young, John Newton was far from God. He had grown up to love the sea and all of the sin that came with it. At one point, Newton had been on the sea for over a year, when the ship he was on encountered a violent storm. In mid-March of 1748, Newton awoke to a violent storm as

his room began to fill with water. He was assigned to the pumps. and heard himself say, "If this will not do, the Lord have mercy upon us."^[2] He worked the pumps from three in the morning until noon, slept for an hour, and then took the helm and steered the ship till midnight. At the wheel, he had time to think back over his life and his spiritual condition. At about six o'clock the next evening it seemed as though there might be hope. "I thought I saw the hand of God displayed in our favor. I began to pray. I could not utter the prayer of faith: I could not draw near to a reconciled God, and call him Father. ... The comfortless principles of infidelity were deeply riveted. ... The great question now was, how to obtain faith."^[3] Such began Newton's seeking of God! Eventually, he found the Lord. But it was the storm that drove him to realize his lost condition and his need for God. John Piper called that storm, "The Precious Storm."^[4]

For John Newton, his journey to the Lord all began when the storm was so bad that "all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned" (verse 20).

So, church family, if you know people who are in that deep, deep, pit of despair, it may be that they are in a very good place, because, there is nowhere else to turn, except to God! The promise of Scripture is that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. That is, saved from sin! saved from the eternal condemnation that sin brings.

A week ago, I was talking with someone who was in this very situation. The circumstances of his life had turned bad. His sin was before him. He was scared for what his future held. I said to him, "You are in a very good spot. You are low. There is no place for you to go, but to the Lord, who forgives sins. So, cry out to him and find in him," I told him. I directed him to read Psalm 32 and Psalm 51, both of which are cries of repentance. I can only pray that he repents.

If this is you, if you this day are in the depths of despair, seek the Lord when he can be found! Cry out to him! Call out to him. These people on the ship were in a situation where "all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned." They were in the perfect spot. Right where God had them.

It is in this situation of desperation that Paul spoke up.

Acts 27:21

Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss.

Essentially, Paul said, "I told you so" (verse 10). Paul continued in the following verses.

Acts 27:22-26

Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.' So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. But we must run aground on some island."

Here is where we see the providence of God. Paul was visited by an angel, who told him that he would get to Rome. This wasn't the first time. In chapter 23, we read of another angel that spoke with Paul, "The following night the Lord stood by [Paul] and said, 'Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome'" (Acts 23:11). What Paul received on the ship was merely a confirmation of what the Lord had already told him, "you must stand before Caesar" (verse 24).

Now, we don't often have such a privilege of being visited by the Lord or an angel, telling us exactly what will take place in our lives! In fact, I have never heard a message from the Lord. God has never spoken to me audibly and told me of his plans for my life. I know lots of people say the following: "God told me" or "God told me this" or "God told me that " I know what they mean. They mean that they have an impression. It is often from the Lord. But I don't believe that God spoke directly to them, as this angel spoke to Paul.

Though God has never told me anything directly, I have his word, God has told me many things in his word that have found great comfort in my heart. Regarding Paul's situation, I can rely on many differences the following verses (among many):

Philippians 4:19, "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." I know that all my needs will be supplied.

Psalms 37:4, "Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart." I know that I find my greatest delight when I am delighting in the LORD.

1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." I have confessed my sins before the Lord. and I know that I'm forgiven and cleansed from my sin!

Now, that doesn't mean that God doesn't have a plan for us, just because he hasn't told us so. Indeed, God has a plan for all of our lives. In Psalm 139:16, David says, "Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them." God has our days numbered. We just don't know how many they are numbered! God, in his providence, will bring all of life's circumstances in our lives for good. This is the promise of Romans 8:28, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

God is working his plan for our lives, whether in good times, or in difficult times. Our text here is talking about the difficult times! For Paul, it was the danger of the storm. But Paul had a specific word in the storm.

Acts 27:24

and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar.

This meant that Paul was going to be saved from the storm. God would providentially save him in his difficult time. And Paul also had a word from the Lord for those in the ship.

Acts 27:24

And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.'

With this vision, Paul had an exhortation for those in the boat:

Acts 27:25-26

So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. 26 But we must run aground on some island."

Surely, after these words came to pass, those in the boat would have thought about Paul's faith and assurance in God to deliver, exactly as he promised. I would not be surprised in eternity to hear of some of those on the boat coming to faith as a result of God's providence to deliver Paul just as he said.

This is often how God uses people going through difficult times. When believers in Christ endure their sufferings with joy, they give a testimony to the world of God's providence in their lives. People look at that with wonder and amazement! Being rich, wealthy and famous doesn't do to much for an unbelieving world. But when you are low and trusting in the Lord through difficult times, people will look on with wonder and amazement.

Consider Hebrews 12:1, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." The idea here is that we must look to all of the believers in Hebrews 11 that have come before us. They have all run with endurance. They have run the race well. We can look to them and be encouraged by them. Further, those who run the race will have evangelistic opportunity for all who are looking on. Those who don't know Christ will see and look with wonder and awe at the Lord's work in your life. I believe that this happened with Paul when all of these things came to occur.

Do you remember the story of Charles Wesley when he was crossing the Atlantic? They faced a storm. But the Moravians who were on the ship were as calm as could be. As a preacher going to preach, Charles Wesley found himself to be lost, because he was terrified of dying. He didn't have the comfort of the Lord. The testimony of the Moravians was a big catalyst leading to Wesley's conversion.

The story continues in verse 27,

Acts 27:27-29

When the fourteenth night had come, as we were being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. So they took a sounding and found twenty fathoms. A little farther on they took a sounding again and found fifteen fathoms. And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come.

These skilled sailors were worried about crashing into to the shore, they were taking measurements of the depth of the sea. One measurement came in at 120 feet. Then it came in at 90. So they dropped anchor. and "prayed" for day to come! This is what the sea does to you, especially in a storm. Those on the boat weren't religious. From what we know, only Paul, Luke and Aristarchus knew the Lord. Yet, here we see, the sailors reaching rock bottom. and praying!

Those on the boat didn't know it at the time, but they were approaching the island of Malta. Hope was dawning that Paul's words would come true! that they would indeed find safety upon the land. Yet, we find the sailors trying to pull a fast one.

Acts 27:30-32

And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, and had lowered the ship's boat into the sea under pretense of laying out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved." Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it go.

Though, in God's providence, he had assured Paul that all would make it to shore, this didn't cause Paul to sit back in complacency and inaction, "Oh, well, let the sailors go! God has promised to deliver us! And he will!" No! God will bring everyone to shore through the skill of the sailors!

In the same way, before the foundation of the world, God has chosen his elect. That's clear in the Bible. See Ephesians 1; Romans 8 and 9! But they come to faith through us sharing the gospel to them! That's why it's important for us to be witnesses for Jesus.

As the story continues, we see Paul taking leadership.

Acts 27:33-38

As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing. Therefore I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you." And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat. Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves. (We were in all 276 persons in the ship.) And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea.

Some think that Paul was celebrating the Lord's supper. I don't think so. I think that Paul was following the customary Jewish custom of uttering a prayer before a meal. This wasn't a Christian setting. I think that Paul was merely doing what the Jewish people regularly did (and still do today). They offered up a prayer to God.

The mention of 276 people on the ship helps to give us an idea of how large this ship was. It wasn't a small rowboat. It will filled with many who needed to prepare themselves for running to boat ashore. But with their stomachs filled, they were ready to crash ashore. They would then need to swim ashore. Food was needed for the swim.

3. Shipwreck (verses 39-44)

Acts 27:39-44

Now when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, on which they planned if possible to run the ship ashore. So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the ropes that tied the rudders. Then hoisting the foresail to the wind they made for the beach. But striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by the surf. The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape. But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land.

Picture the scene. They were running the ship into the beach. But before arriving ashore, they were stuck in the reef. The boat then begins filling with water and sinking and breaking up. Those who could swim jumped out and swam for the shore. Those who couldn't swim took hold of pieces of the ship. Holding on, they were not drawn out to sea, they drifted onto the beach.

This was the providence of God to bring Paul save. And not only Paul, but all 276 people on the ship were brought safely to shore. This is in accordance with the promise of God to bring them all to safety. This is brought out in verse 44, "And so it was that all were brought safely to land." This is my final point.

4. Safe (verse 44)

They were brought safely to shore, even through difficult times. Even through the danger of the storm, God's providence brought them safely to the land. I do believe that Luke includes this entire story of the storm and the shipwreck because of the vision that Paul received in verse 24.

I want to turn my message now to a grand point of application. At one time or another in our lives, we will all come into difficult times.

I wrote this past week in the Weekly Word (my weekly email to the church) of what Chris Brauns shared with the Red Brick Church this past Thursday night. Chris is the pastor of the church. He told the church of how Jamie, his wife, has been diagnosed with a pancreatic neuroendocrine tumor. It's a rare form of pancreatic cancer, that isn't quite as aggressive as the normal pancreatic cancer (adenocarcinoma). Yet, still the situation is quite serious. The Brauns family has a long road ahead of them as they deal with this difficult illness. They are looking at chemotherapy and surgery.

I have told you several times about the five students who were killed a month ago, when they were hit on the highway by a semi going the wrong direction. Though these young people were followers of Christ and are safe in his arms in heaven, life isn't over for their families. The families have a long road ahead of them, as they walk the difficult road of losing a child or brother or sister.

Back in December, I told you of Mickey Klink, pastor of Hope Evangelical Free Church, in Roscoe. His wife was recently diagnosed with ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease), a disease that has no cure. This disease will take his wife in the next few years. The Klink family has a long, difficult road ahead of them, as they watch the muscles of a wife and mother, deteriorate before their eyes slowly over the next few years.

These are but a few of the public difficulties that we have heard about at Rock Valley Bible Church in recent months. But I am sure that many of you could point to your own private difficult times that you are experiencing right now, difficult times in your marriage. difficult times with your children. difficult times with your finances. difficult times with extended family. difficult times with your neighbor. difficult times at school or at work or in some other social circle.

The question rightly comes, "How am I to face such difficult times?" At the cost of being simplistic (yet totally sufficient), I would simply tell you to trust in the providence of God. The illness, the difficult, the hardship that has come upon your life, has not caught God by surprise. Neither has God abdicated control over the situation. For some reason or another, God has brought these things into our lives. We need to trust the Lord through them. If God were not powerful enough to prevent these circumstances, then he is not powerful enough to help you through them, because other, bigger things still yet out of his control might come. You hope and trust in the Lord will come as you see that God is providentially in charge of all things.

I close my message with a phrase from text that I received from Chris Brauns on Thursday evening about his wife's cancer. He wrote to me, "Tough news from our end, God is on the throne"

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on February 26, 2023 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[2] John Newton, *Memoirs* (London: Maxwell, 1813), 67. You can access the book here: <https://archive.org/details/memoirsofrevjohn00newtrich>.

[3] Ibid., 70.

[4] See <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-saved-a-wretch-like-him>.