

**Series: YOUR MISSION...SHOULD YOU CHOOSE TO ACCEPT IT - January 6, 2008**

**LIGHTEN THE LOAD**

**Acts 27**

**I. INTRO**

- A. When we moved to Markham, over 15 years ago now, I brought my boat with me. It was actually more like a 12 ft. green bathtub. But it was **mine**. Technically, the whole family could fit in the boat—but the gunwales were only about 8 inches off the water. You didn't want to rock the boat!

-We were visiting Lori's family up at Elim Lodge on Pigeon Lake, we all decided to go out in the boat. What we **hadn't** figured on was the wake of other boats. When a good-sized boat went by, the front of my green bathtub dipped under the water, and one of us got a very wet butt. I won't tell you which of us it was—but she was pretty upset.

-I came to this amazing realization that day; fully loaded boats are okay in **calm** water—but you don't want to hit a storm in one! Especially when what you love most—like your family--is in it!

- B. As I thought about my life...our lives...I realized that they're kinda like boats on a lake. They can get pretty full—you know—with stuff, activities, work. And some of our lives have high performance engines. They're moving **fast!** And, of course, some of us feel like we've got holes in the bottom of the boat—and we're bailing!  
-The point is—the most precious cargo in our boats—our lives—are people! And when our lives are really, **really** full and going really, **really** fast—a storm becomes a real problem.

1. This past week we all sailed our lives into the uncharted waters of 2008. And **none** of us can predict what it will hold. The **nasty** side if it, of course, is that in this next year, I will gain a year in age. And so will **you!**

-The **good** side is that it will present a year's worth of brand new opportunities. I will have a chance to make a difference in this world—and so will you!

-Of course, the **tough** side to another year is that you and I will face unknown challenges and problems. Things that shake us up. Make us wish for a place of calm and peace. Some of us will face storms. Storms that make me feel unsafe; afraid—like everything's on the line.

2. What I'd like to do this morning is briefly tell the story of a nasty storm—a typhoon, really—that an early church leader by the name of Paul found himself in. And I'd like to use it as a simple analogy for life. My life. Your life. Are you okay with that?

-As we talk together, I want you to think about your life. What's weighing you down and holding you back? How are you doing as far as speed is concerned? And is the One who knows the future in your boat—in your life?

## II. STORMS, WEIGHT AND SPEED

A. The story I'm referring to is found in the New Testament book of Acts, which describes the spread of the Early Church. Paul had done jail time in Jerusalem for following and teaching about Jesus. As a final resort, he used his option as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar, and was sent there in the care of a Roman military captain. This is a **long** trip—about 2400 kilometers. And to get there required a long sea voyage on the Mediterranean, which could be extremely treacherous.

1. Of course, the deal is that Paul **knows** the One who controls the weather. They are barely into the trip when Paul warned this captain about what lay ahead of them.

**“Men,” he said, “I believe there is trouble ahead if we go on - shipwreck, loss of cargo, and danger to our lives as well.” But the officer in charge of the prisoners listened more to the ship’s captain and the owner than to Paul. (Acts 27:10-11 NLT)**

-Of course, at this point Paul is just another guy wearing striped pajamas—and they ignore him.

Well, they hit a typhoon—where winds can hit 200 kph and waves can easily reach 40 to 50 feet. Paul is on a grain ship from Alexandria, Egypt. These things comparatively speaking, were huge. Probably over 200 feet long, from what experts have been able to find out.

-But it's no match for the storm, and the sailors know that. They're tying the hull with ropes, putting out sea anchors—basically trying to keep it top side up. When you're on a ship, top side up is a good thing!

-Then this:

**The next day, as gale-force winds continued to batter the ship, the crew began throwing the cargo overboard. The following day they even took some of the ship’s gear and threw it overboard. The terrible storm raged for many days, blotting out the sun and the stars, until at last all hope was gone. (Acts 27:28-20 NLT)**

2. This crusty old Roman military captain quickly realizes that Paul is in close touch with Someone **way** bigger than him. And Paul speaks hope into a hopeless situation.

**Finally, Paul called the crew together and said, “Men, you should have listened to me in the first place and not left Crete. You would have avoided all this damage and loss. But take courage! None of you will lose your lives, even though the ship will go down. For last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me, and he said,**

**‘Don’t be afraid, Paul, for you will surely stand trial before Caesar! What’s more, God in his goodness has granted safety to everyone**

**sailing with you.’ So take courage! For I believe God. It will be just as he said. But we will be shipwrecked on an island.” (Acts 27:21-26 NLT)**

-And that’s exactly what happened. The passage goes on to describe this shipwreck in great detail.

They found a sandy bay, sailed for it, and hit a sand bar. As the waves literally bashed this huge ship to pieces—all 276 people grabbed pieces of wood and swam for shore—which happened to be the island of Malta. Not a single person was lost! The great news is that God works—even in shipwrecks!

- B. When life is going well, the winds are calm, sun’s shinin’, cotton’s high, Daddy’s rich and Mama’s pretty—we really don’t think too much about storms, do we? Just like the captain on this ship, we shop for advice until someone tells us what we **want** to hear. We think, “How bad could it be?”

-Sometimes people who believe in God assume that He will be their **storm insurance**. That if we do the right things—God will keep us from high winds and big waves. You know—the genie in the bottle.

1. God has promised those who love and follow Him a **lot!** That He will **never** leave us, that He will give us strength for **all** life brings, that He will guard our hearts and mind and give us peace, give us wisdom when we ask for it, make His strength perfect in our weakness, replace our fear with courage and work for our good in everything life throws at us.

-But He has never promised that we’ll escape all the storms. I wish I could lay out for you a six point plan on how to avoid every storm—but I can’t. In fact, Jesus was with his disciples on two occasions when they ran into really nasty, life-threatening storms. What He showed in those occasions is that you and I are **always** safe when the Master of all storms is with us. And that’s precisely why Paul was so confident when everyone else was flipping out in this typhoon.

2. It’s not all that hard to be prepared in any given year for the great things life brings, is it? The wins. The surges. The moments we’ll remember forever. But we also need to be prepared for the bad weather. And every year has bad weather—of varying degrees, doesn’t it?

-To continue the analogy from this story, I think there are some things we can do to survive storms; stay top side up, bottom side down—which is a **real** good thing when it comes to boats, by the way!

### III. HOW TO SURVIVE STORMS

- A. As you read this story, the one thing that sticks out is that Paul **warned** the captain and the owners and the sailors about the storm they would hit. He got his

information from a good source. God. But they didn't listen. Most smart sailors, no matter **how** good they are on the seas, don't knowingly sail into a typhoon!

-I once went deep sea fishing with my Dad in a storm—and I got **so sick** on that trip I wanted to die! All to catch a few mackerel! The very next time we went, I could hear the wind whistling through the trees and I refused to go. I know—I'm a wimp! My Dad reluctantly stayed behind to keep my company. Not only did no one catch anything—**everyone** on the fishing boat got sick. Even the first mate!

1. Here's my point—and there **is** one. Sometimes storms come as a surprise; sometimes **we** create the storm, or sail right into it even though we know better. People who love us, warn us—and we blow them off, just like this Roman captain blew Paul off.
2. That's all I'm going to say—but my guess is that some of you this morning are involved in something, maybe a relationship or a habit—something you **know** is either wrong for you—or wrong **period!** It could be that someone who knows and loves you has already warned you. It could be that the Spirit of God is speaking to you, warning you—and you're not about to change! I just want to urge you to **listen!** You could spare yourself a lot of heartache.

B. One of the first things the sailors did to make it through the storm is try to slow it down. They put out sea anchors—because the wind was driving them where they didn't want to go.

-A general principle is—speed and storms don't mix well. I've tried! Anyone here ever watch hydroplane races? These boats are like this sliver of fiberglass with a huge turbocharged engine on them. In seconds, they can be traveling at up to 200 mph. If you watch closely, you realize that the only part of them actually **in** the water is the prop. A tiny wave can throw them end over end.

1. How many of you suspect that you **may** have been going too fast in 2007? How many of you **know** you were going too fast in 2007? How many of you thought the new year was 2007?  
 -Man, life goes fast, doesn't it? And it seems like all the equipment being offered to us is to make it go even faster. So fast there's no time to build relationships, no time to love life, notice beauty, help someone in need—or build your soul.  
 -John Ortberg tells a story about moving into a position as teaching pastor at Willow Creek Community Church—a huge church outside of Chicago. He called one of his mentors and asked, "How can I keep my soul healthy in the middle of all this." His mentor's advice was, "**Ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.**" John said he wrote that down and said, "Okay, let's keep moving. I don't have much time. What's next...?" There was this long pause, and the guy said, "That's it! Ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life."

2. It's true. Most of us, if we had our preference, would not want a car that was made quickly. We would not want a home that was built quickly. When we go out for dinner, we don't want food that's cooked quickly—micro-waved. -I honestly don't think we want a life—or a soul—that's built quickly, either. Maybe, this year, 2008, you need to follow the advice John Ortberg was given. **Ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.** Fast, hair on fire, Mach 3 needs to go overboard—if you're going to make it through the storm and live the life, live the mission God is calling you do live.

-Know what happens sometimes in people whose lives are a blur? They convince themselves that **some** day—things will settle down. "I'm going to engage, use my gifts, serve the poor, invest my life in others—you know, **when things settle down.** Know when life settles down? When you die. It settles right down, then—rigor mortis will do that to you!

-God won't magically settle your life down as you toss a prayer out the window on the way by. You have to make conscious choices to do that. And if you're headed for some waves, it could save your life! The point of life is to finish well—and complete your mission. **Too fast** can ruin both of those things if your life ends up in pieces flotsam on the sea you're racing through!

- C. What I **really** wanted to get at today, though, is the stuff you need to leave behind as you move into this new year. The stuff that's weighing you down, slowing you down—and, in fact, may have you sitting dead in the water with waves coming over the side.

-Most of us have an idea of when our body's too heavy, right? I'll never forget the day, coming home from college, when I shave off my beard—and found I'd grown another chin. I thought, "If I don't do something, I'll need a bookmark to find my mouth!" Now we even have wonderful tests to determine our percentage of body fat. Ken Davis, the comedian, says that he doesn't need one of those. He says, "I just get out of the shower, stand naked in front of a mirror, jump, and click a stopwatch and see how long it takes until everything stops moving!"

-What we sometimes have trouble discerning is when our life—the whole **ship** is unnecessarily weighed down! This morning, before we take communion, I want you to think about that. This could be **your** day to let some stuff go; throw some stuff overboard **before** the winds kick up.

1. If you know much about boats or ships, you probably know there's something down in the very bottom called the **bilge**. The bilge is the deepest part, right in the center of a boat. When waves wash over the side, that's where the water goes. That's also the place where all the oil and garbage end up. And someone has to either pump it out or bail it out—because it weighs everything down. I'm guessing that on this ship Paul was on in that awful storm, there was a whole crew on bilge duty! Know what all the stuff in the bilge of a ship is called? **Bilge!**

In our lives, the deepest, most central part of us is called—the heart. It's actually most important part of who we are. Out of it comes our most noble moments—and also some *really* dark stuff.

-We actually don't think much about it. But when greed, grudges and unresolved anger and lust wash over our lives—they go right into our hearts. Guilt and shame washes over our ship—and sinks into the bilge. Hopelessness, addictions, stress and brokenness settles into the *bilge* of our hearts.

-Sometimes it stays there and weighs us down because we can't figure out how to get rid of it. We can sink lower and lower and lower. To the point where a tiny wave can put us under the surface.

- b. Anyone have any bilge you'd like to pump out of your heart? The Bible, after listing a whole bunch of things—well, let me just read it for you:

**And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:30-32 NLT)**

-This stuff doesn't just make us sad—it makes the Holy Spirit sad. See, He knows that you can be free—and He knows what a free you could do for the world.

See, He's the One Who keeps you moving forward, He's the wind in the sails of your life! He gives you power, keeps you going in the right direction! When it comes to bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, slander and evil behavior—what are the two *key words* that tell you what to do with it? **GET RID!** It's not worth holding onto. It will contaminate your ship. It will fill up your heart—that deep center of your life--with garbage and decay.

-Let me get *real* specific. Whoever has hurt you and made you angry—and you may have a *right* to be angry—but you really, *really* need to let it go. If you don't, it will putrefy from anger to resentment—and then from resentment to bitterness. Will you let it go? Today. Will you bail it out of our life—and dump it into the sea of God's forgiveness and grace?

-See, the deal is that all God needs is your permission—and His Spirit, with your cooperation, will do the dirty work of scooping out all the stuff that's accumulated. He's *really* good at cleaning things out! If you ask for forgiveness and grace and help—He will pour His power into you. You could be power-washed!

- c. Hey, what about **this** one! Anyone have any regrets? Things you wish you'd done—accomplished? Things you wish you **hadn't** done? Some intersection where you should've turned right—and you turned left?

-The **past** is the most powerless, fruitless place to be in life cause you can't change it. If you'll hear this—it will help. You've cried enough tears. You've hated and despised yourself way more than enough. You've gone through enough self-loathing, kicked yourself enough, said enough "**Sigh!** If only's!" The horrible beating Christ took and the death He suffered was **enough! Enough!** If you've **asked** for forgiveness—it's **forgiven! Let it go! Pump it out of the bilge.** It's weighing you down—and you weren't created to live with a guilty heart. It's **really** heavy stuff.

2. There's something very fascinating about this story. One of the very first things the sailors threw overboard was the most profitable thing they were carrying. Their cargo. The grain. This was an Egyptian **grain ship**. The cargo was the **point** of their trip, right?
- a. But if your cargo is going to take you to the bottom...? You've gotta get rid of it. Jesus once made that call in a rich young guy's life. The guy came to him, thinking that maybe Jesus was just going to give him a perfect score for keeping all the rules. Jesus basically said, "Your **cargo** has taken over your life! You need to sell it, give it away, free your heart up to love others and follow me."
- b. But the guy was thinking—like we sometimes do, "The cargo I carry is the **point** of my life! My cargo is the sign to others that I'm a successful person! How do you expect me to live without my cargo? I mean, isn't life all about loading your ship full—and hauling it to your final port—where you then unload it into your **kid's** ship?"
- c. There's nothing wrong with cargo. You just have to remember that a **lot** of cargo takes a **lot** of time to count, maintain, protect and insure. It weighs a lot—takes up a lot of space. And your life, believe it or not, is not some kind of cargo ship!  
-Anyone know what the only thing was that got saved off this whole ship? What did Paul ask God for? The 276 people on board were the most important thing on this ship. When you're in a storm—save the people, not the cargo.
- d. Life isn't about how much cargo you can fit into your ship. It's the people on board. It's the people you touch and influence. This morning, you may need to say to God, "My cargo—the money and stuff I'm carrying through life—has become my pre-occupation instead of people—what **You** love. Would you help me trade in my cargo for people?"

3. There's one more thing that got thrown overboard. I was a little surprised at this. It was the **ship's gear**. That's short for sails, ropes, pulleys—all the stuff they used to run the ship. And yet they **ran the ship without it!**  
 -Think of all the stuff we prop our lives up with. Stuff we're absolutely **sure** we need; cars, cell phones, sound systems, HDTVs, laptops, Blackberry's, Ipods, Tim Horton's, Starbuck's, The Gap. It's all the activities, the classes, the forms of insurance--it's the **gear** of life. I guess what I'm thinking is that we sometimes get all caught up in the **gear** of life; all the stuff that **surrounds** life—and is a help to life. But it's **not** life. And sometimes it does, in fact, distract us; burn through our time; demand our time, money and attention.  
 -It's a good thing—especially before a storm—to think, “Does life really require all this **gear**—or could some of it go overboard? Do I need to “lighten my ship” a little so I can ride the waves better—and not plow through them?”
4. I've got **great** news for you this morning. Jesus is here! And Jesus is Master of the storm. Jesus is the only One who offers forgiveness! He's the God of the second chance! He's relieved people of their burden of guilt and shame. He's forgiven pasts, settled futures, replaced chaos with peace, healed brokenness, given hope, shown people how to live—way more times than anyone can count. He is way more present in this communion service, this time when we remember the price He paid for us than you would dream. He'll take whatever you're ready to unload! He can set you free—and if **He** sets you free, well—you're free!

#### IV. CLOSING

As you take communion this morning, what do you want to leave behind? I'm going to ask you to write it down on a piece of paper—and we're going to burn it.

-Some of you may need to write down stuff that is creating hurry—chaos, really, in your life. And you need to just be ruthless with it.

-Some of the weight you're carrying is just **bilge** stuff. The extra weight of unforgiveness, bitterness, broken things, guilt, regret, unresolved hurt. Maybe it's deep sadness you've been carrying. Maybe it's something that's gaining control over your life. Toss it overboard! Write it. Toss it. Burn it. Leave it behind! Jesus is with you—and He can replace it with love and grace and hope!

-I'm going to give you some time to think and seek God. As you do—watch this clip. It's from The Mission. The guy Robert DeNiro plays has been a monster. He's killed and enslaved the people native to South America. And it haunts him. He's asked to climb a cliff carrying this load representing all his guilt and shame. Watch what happens as it falls from his back.