

# Temptation Island

## *Standing Firm in God's Will*

March 20, 2022

Today we're *increasing* our boldness by *reading* the story of *Temptation Island*.



**Would you like a Mediterranean getaway?** For say, three *months*. All expenses *paid*. Fed and pampered like a *god*. Lavished with every honor you can imagine. *Or ...* would you prefer an old Roman *dungeon*? Guess which one *Paul* chose. Last Sunday we saw that sharing our faith is hindered when we **underestimate the power of God's cure for death, or the need for it – or when we lack the compassion for those around us**, to learn the simple basics to share Jesus *simply, plainly, and clearly*. But during Q&A we realized there's a *fourth huge* hindrance (when *knowing* the power and the need, and *having* the compassion): it's **lacking the boldness**.

Noah ended his sermon, enticing us to read the rest of Paul's shipwreck story. So I *did*. This, by the way, is a recently discovered 2,000-year-old Roman shipwreck, from Paul's day, with its steering tiller still intact. Here's a composite of over 1,000 photos. It's deep in the oxygen-free Black Sea, near the Mediterranean, with 60 *other* ships! Check out this ornate steering gear with its 1,200-year-old ropes still in place! Now, at this point, "Paul's *whole heart*", his God-given *passion* and *mission*, is that "by *some means*" he "may find a way in the will of *God* to get to Rome" that *they* "may be established" and *both* "may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith" that he "might have a harvest" as a bondservant of "the Good News of God's Son". (Rom 1:9-13 NIV/NKJ)

I hadn't realized how **Paul's shipwreck story is actually about the Lord sending him to temptation island!** So *now* I *gotta read* it to you. You see, back in the *Bible* days folks didn't go to *church* to hear a *sermon*. That's a *modern* convention. They went to have the Bible *read* to them; because *they* were mostly *illiterate* and couldn't *read* it. But *nowadays*, being very literate, **we don't read it because we're mostly busy, and distracted, and lazy, and mostly just don't want to read it.** My life's quest is to *convince* you that **God's Word is a great read** – if you approach it first and foremost as a child: simply *relaxing* and *reading* or *listening* to *discover* and *absorb* the *accounts* and *folks* involved. Because our Father says, **if we load His stories in our heart, we have ears to hear Him when He speaks.** (Ezek 3:10)

Now, the story of *Temptation Island* was written by Dr. Luke, who joined *Paul's* quest, and kept a log of their high seas adventures. We call it the book of Acts.

So, let's read what Luke wrote, likely on the deck of a gently swaying, sailing ship.



<sup>1</sup> When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named *Julius*, who belonged to the *Imperial Regiment*. [*impressive*]

<sup>2</sup> We boarded a ship [*at Caesarea*] ... and we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us. [*The Thessalonians have two letters in the NT: 1st and 2nd Thessalonians*]

<sup>3</sup> The next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius, [*the centurion*] in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs. [*Julius liked Paul, respected Paul, and wanted to set Paul free ... as you'll see*]

<sup>4</sup> From there we put out to sea again ... <sup>5</sup> [and] we landed at Myra in Lycia. <sup>6</sup> There [*Julius*] the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board. ... <sup>8</sup> We moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a place called Fair Havens [*like in Bellingham*] ... <sup>9</sup> Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the *Fast*. [*The Day of Atonement, in October*]

So Paul warned them, <sup>10</sup> “Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also.” <sup>11</sup> But [*Julius*] the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship. <sup>12</sup> Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority [*of the 276 onboard*] decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter *there*. ... <sup>13</sup> so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. <sup>14</sup> Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the “northeaster,” swept down from the island. <sup>15</sup> The ship was caught by the storm ... <sup>17</sup> [the men] passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Fearing that they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. <sup>18</sup> We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. <sup>19</sup> On the third day, they threw the ship’s tackle overboard with their own hands. <sup>20</sup> When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved. [*That’s how the Lord often gets our attention*]

<sup>21</sup> After the men had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: “Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete [*it’s not an I-told-you-so, it’s a take-my-advice-this-time*] ... <sup>22</sup> But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the *ship* will be *destroyed*. [*It’s a good-news-bad-news thing; but*]

<sup>23</sup> Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me <sup>24</sup> and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; [again, god-news-bad-news] and God has graciously given *you* the *lives* of all who sail *with* you.’ <sup>25</sup> So keep up your *courage*, men, for *I* have faith in *God* that it will *happen* just as he told me. <sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, [*there’s a P.S.*] we must run aground on some island.” [*“Seems God’s got an unscheduled stop for us,” which is how He often schedules our divine appoints]*

<sup>27</sup> On the fourteenth night we were still being driven across the Adriatic Sea, when about midnight the *sailors* sensed they were approaching land. <sup>28</sup> They took soundings and found that the water was a hundred and twenty feet deep. A short time later they took soundings again and found it was ninety feet deep. <sup>29</sup> Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. [*They’re praying ... but not for God’s will*]

<sup>30</sup> In an attempt to escape from the ship, the *sailors* let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow.



<sup>31</sup> Then Paul said to [Julius] the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless *these* men stay with the ship, *you* cannot be saved.” [Mostly because *... they’re the sailors*]

<sup>32</sup> So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it fall away. <sup>33</sup> Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. “For the last fourteen days,” he said, “you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food—you haven’t eaten anything. <sup>34</sup> Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head.” <sup>35</sup> After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then *he* broke it and began to eat. <sup>36</sup> They were *all* encouraged and ate some food themselves. <sup>37</sup> Altogether there were 276 of us on board. <sup>38</sup> When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea. <sup>39</sup> When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could. <sup>40</sup> Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach. <sup>41</sup> But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf. <sup>42</sup> The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. <sup>43</sup> But the centurion [Julius] wanted to spare Paul’s life and [singlehandedly] kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. <sup>44</sup> The rest were to get there on planks or on pieces of the ship. In this way *everyone* reached land in safety. <sup>1</sup> Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. [70° in the winter; and] <sup>2</sup> The *islanders* showed us *unusual* kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. <sup>3</sup> Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. [Another divine appointment to get their attention; and] <sup>4</sup> When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, “This man *must* be a *murderer*; for though he escaped from the *sea*, Justice has not allowed him to *live*.” <sup>5</sup> But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. <sup>6</sup> The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead, but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, *they changed their minds and said he was a god*. <sup>7</sup> There was an estate nearby that belonged to *Publius*, the chief official of the island. [Likely a Roman outpost] He *welcomed* us to his home and for three days entertained us hospitably. <sup>8</sup> His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. <sup>9</sup> When *this* had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. <sup>10</sup> *They honored* us in many ways [for three months!] and when we were ready to sail, [from paradise to impending prison] they furnished us with the supplies we needed. <sup>11</sup> After *three months* we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island. It was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux. – Acts 27:1-28:11 NIV

Good ol’ Castor and Pollux! Paul’s ever-present reminders of the idolatry that permeates the world that he’d been called to *cure*. You see, finding our way in God’s will, will include **struggling with temptations, especially our blessings, which serves to strengthen and train our faith.**

I mean, **He put Paul on a Mediterranean, island! And gave him godlike status! For 3 months!** With a Chief who owes his father's *life* to Paul. *Sailors* and *soldiers* who owe their *own* lives to Paul. *Islanders* who see him as a *miracle* worker. And Julius who, according to Acts 26:32, represented those who wanted *Paul* to stop *legally appealing* to see *Caesar*, so *they* could set him *free!* Now ... *what* was that *angel* saying back on that *ship* about *needing* to appear before *Caesar* – and maybe *die* in a *dungeon*? Cuz it'd *sure* be easy to *ignore*.

So **enjoy your blessings, but don't let 'em take you off course.** Cuz when we make it through our *storms*, we tend to settle for the blessings we *currently* have, rather than pressing on, ever deeper, into the unknown will of God. Two things get in our *way* when it comes to His *will*: **facing our fears** and **denying our desires.** And we need *courage* and *boldness* for *both!* So **what's holding you back?** Fear of the unknown, or knowing what you'd need to leave behind? Paul's gotta be thinking, "I could sure *settle* for this little *slice* of heaven!" But more than *anything*, Paul wanted *God's will* with his "whole heart". And he'd asked God to get him to Rome and give him a harvest. And *he* knew **if we just keep pushing through, we'll find God's will and our created purpose joining together in ways we couldn't've imagined!**

[Well] <sup>13</sup> We reached Puteoli. <sup>14</sup> There we found some brothers who invited us to spend a week with them. [Which Julius the centurion allowed] And so we came to Rome. <sup>15</sup> The brothers there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged. [More so than he'd imagined when he wrote how he anticipated the mutual encouragement of their stories of faith (Rom 1:11-12) ; and] <sup>16</sup> When we got to Rome, [writes Dr. Luke, amazed and elated, I'm sure, because] Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him. [An unexpected perk God gave him for trading an island paradise for a Roman dungeon] <sup>17</sup> Three days later he called together the leaders of the Jews. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: "My brothers ... <sup>20</sup> it is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain." ["Cuz I could'a stayed on this little island ..."] ... <sup>22</sup> [They replied] "We want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect." <sup>23</sup> They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers ... From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. <sup>24</sup> Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. ... <sup>30</sup> For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. <sup>31</sup> Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ. – Acts 28:13-31 NIV

And **that's what he traded those sandy beaches for.** Though he had no idea at the time. But **Saint's gotta serve!** Especially a *bondservant* who's been set *free*, and *chooses* to keep following his loving lord. Especially *the Lord*. And Paul indeed received that *harvest* he'd so longed for, thanks, in large part, to Temptation Island. He *wrote* about it to the Philippians.

<sup>1</sup>To all the saints in Christ Jesus ... <sup>7</sup> whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the Gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. ... <sup>12</sup> I want you to know, brothers, that *what* has *happened* to me has really served to *advance* the Gospel. <sup>13</sup> As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. [Yup. That's for sure!] – Philippians 1:1-13 NIV

Ol' Julius likely *loved* to tell the *story* of the *prisoner* who “*saved every last soldier, sailor, prisoner, and passenger! Unfazed by a deadly snake bite! Miraculously healed every disease on the island. We were honored like gods for three months! Every Roman’s wildest dream! All because of him ... well ... his faith. Could’a stayed. I’d’a let him. Nobody wanted to send him to Caesar. But when the time came, he just put out his hands for the chains, and said, ‘Time we be on our way!’*”

<sup>14</sup> *Because of my chains, [writes Paul] most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the Word of God more courageously and fearlessly. [So if you lack boldness, we’re actually told to look to Paul as he looks to Christ (1 Cor 11:1)] ...* <sup>19</sup> Through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. <sup>20</sup> I eagerly expect and hope that I will ... have sufficient *courage* so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. <sup>21</sup> For [and here’s the big secret for his confidence in his deliverance] to me, to live is [all about] Christ and to die is [to be with Him; and that’s a] gain. [“So how can I lose?”] – Philippians 1:14-21 NIV

Temptation Island wasn’t Paul’s *passion* or *purpose*; **he recognized it for the blessed little break it was.** Then it was back to his *true passion* and *purpose*: living or dying for Christ. **Anything else – even paradise itself – eventually brings a deep sense of discontent** that many of us feel; which is why **you gotta get off your lazy island and get back into God’s will.**

<sup>27</sup> *Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ ... stand firm in one spirit ...* <sup>29</sup> For it has been granted to you on *behalf* of Christ not *only* to believe *on* Him, but also to suffer *for* Him, <sup>30</sup> since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had ... <sup>4:12</sup> I have learned the *secret* of being content in *any* and *every* situation, whether well fed [for three months] or hungry, [for fourteen days] whether living in plenty or in want. [He *literally* had *everything*; but who has ever pictured Paul and Luke sitting on an island beach sipping *Soumadas* for three months?! *Soumadas* are a sweet, almond-based signature Mediterranean island beverage. So, Paul’s “*secret*” is *this*:] <sup>4:13</sup> I can do everything through Him who gives me strength. ... [And *because* of this, when Paul signs off, he *gets* to say] <sup>4:22</sup> All the saints send you greetings, *especially* those who belong to *Caesar’s household.* – Philippians 1:27-30; 4:12-22 NIV



**Paul learned the secret of being truly, courageously, boldly content.**

**Have you?**

**Time we pray, and be on our way.**