

(Running the Race to the End)

- *Sense of the storm; God standing with Paul in the darkest times - even when some of the other believers had lost sight of him!*

Introduction

- What has been your darkest time?
 - (image: woman in despair)
 - feeling a panic before Holiday Club, pressure of things to do, struggles of difficult relationships with people on the team, the lack of sleep - in Motherwell the death threat guy! - the spiritual spanners in the works...
 - or when I fell out with the colleague I worked with?
 - that sense there sometimes is that everything seems fine, until disaster strikes (v.13)
 - maybe for you its been health, perhaps physical, perhaps mental...
 - or the pressures of caring for others...
 - or work... or bullying... or any of a million other things

Hope was lost

- (Image: barbed wire/without hope)
- Sense of the storm...
 - fragility of the boat
 - sense of fear and awe at power of the weather pervading these chapters
 - cargo, the main reason for the ship's journey, being ditched...
 - (if we look ahead to next week's passage, the ship being deserted by the experts (v.30))
 - even the tackle, allowing them to raise sail, going overboard (v.19)
 - lack of control over their future (v.17; "let the ship be driven along")
 - darkness (v.20) storm we finally gave up all hope of being saved...
 - there was a lack of food, of rest no doubt, of those things that humanly refresh and strengthen us...

Hope was found

- (Image: Hope letters)
- But in the midst of this darkness, hope was found
 - Paul speaks to the men on the boat
 - can't be quite sure of the tone of v.21! Can't really have been all that smug, given the context...!
 - given what comes later more likely a sense of concern for their well-being - a sense not wanting them to have to have gone through all this...
 - there are encouraging words - "keep up your courage" and promise of good beyond what currently is visible - "none of you will be lost"
 - there is realism, though - "only the ship will be destroyed"
- All of this is rooted in a visit from an angel of God, an assurance of God's presence:
 - (image: Hope letters with verse quote)
 - angel comes and stands with Paul in the ship, in the storm, in the despair
 - brings a promise from God, a double-sided promise...
 - for Paul, that his purpose in his life will be fulfilled, his standing in Rome bear witness to Jesus Christ... in the context of a trial, to be sure!
 - for the men with him, a gracious, undeserved, promise of God's protection
- Paul has confidence in the promise because of what he knows of the one who made it:
 - for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me (v.25)
- **Cling onto God's promise in whatever situation we face, for he is faithful and he promises to never leave us or desert us**