

- ***READ Acts 9:1-9*** One simple lesson that we can learn from Paul's (then Saul's) trip to Damascus here in this text is that things simply don't always go according to plan. If ever there was a year when we could all offer up a hearty amen to that thought...it would certainly be this year. This year has certainly not gone as I thought it would. I doubt no one expected for our world to be turned upside down by COVID-19. The entire world has literally come to a screeching halt because of the need for social distancing measures to help curb the spread of the virus. Life after life has been dramatically altered if not cut short all together. We all seem to simply be flying by the seat of our pants day after day hoping for continued better news of the virus receding and life getting back towards what we have always been used to.
- However, it didn't take a global pandemic for many in our own state to have their worlds turned upside down. This church is well aware of the tragedy that took place nearly three months ago when horrific tornadoes tore through middle Tennessee. That day still seems all too surreal to me, but the horrible affects remain entirely real. My friends Erin, Josh, and Sawyer Kimberlin, along with at least 21 other people, were killed. Lives were not just lost, but lives were broken by the loss of such dear loved ones. I will never forget March 3, 2020 or the days that followed.
- While the sadness of that time will linger for years to come, there will also be a number of incredible moments that will endure along beside them. The funeral for my friends was one of the most touching events that I have ever been a part of. This is true not just for the outpouring of love that was shown, but also for the number of things that happened that seem nothing short of providential. If you have seen the aftermath of a tornado, then you know that it leaves absolute chaos behind. The family of the Kimberlins spend many days digging through the rubble of what was once their home looking for any belongings of significance that could be salvaged. Some things were found right there on the property, but many items were found even miles away having been swept away by the storm.
- They were able to find Sawyer's flash helmet that he wore as a young boy to help keep his head shaped properly. They were able to find Erin's wedding dress that was still sealed in its case. Toys, stuffed animals, pictures, and many more precious possessions were found though many were also lost to the storm's devastation. But on top of everything, the Bibles of Erin and Josh were found. In fact, Erin's mom Tricia had Erin's Bible with her at the worship assembly the following Sunday. It was preserved perfectly within its case, and the case had not even sustained any serious damage. Josh's Bible was also found, and naturally his family looked through it to see what was to be found.
- Like many Christians, Josh had some handwritten notes in the inside cover of his Bible. He had some quick references for certain Scriptures, but he also had a quote written right there to be seen as often as it could be. It reads, **"I can not change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination."** Brothers and sisters, if there is a thought that was more needed during that week and more needed in the times that we are currently in...then I sure would love to hear it. This sentence has been on my for nearly three months, and I hope it remains on my mind for the rest of my life.
- I am so hopeful that it will remain on my mind because the principles laid for in this quotation concerning our destination, the winds of life, and our ability to adjust are firmly planted in Scripture, and these principles and truths can greatly aid each and everyone of us as we make our way through each of our individual journeys in this life. This morning, I would like to think upon this sentence, examine how it was true in Paul's life, and then consider the need for us to take these thoughts to heart within our own lives.

I. Paul's Journey

A. Acts 9:1-9

1. We began with this text, but let's examine it quickly in a bit more depth. First, what was Paul's destination in this text? We see him as this very zealous persecutor of the people of Jesus. He wants to go to Damascus in order to persecute more of these people that he sees as being nothing but heretics and troublemakers.
2. However, the wind that causes him trouble in this journey is the appearance of Jesus. Jesus comes to him on the road to Damascus and allows Saul to see that He indeed is alive and the Son of God. The persecutor of The Way now has an important decision to make. How does he adjust his sails?

3. Thankfully, he adjusts his course and plots a new destination that involves being an Apostle, preacher, and teacher of the Gospel.

B. Acts 16:6-11

1. Later on, we find that in Paul's zeal for preaching the Gospel and sharing it in areas where it has not yet been heard, he makes the decision to set a course for Asia & Bithynia in order to teach the Good News of Jesus.
2. However, he is stopped two times by the Holy Spirit from going to these areas to preach.
3. Like the first example, Paul adjusts his course and heeds the call he receives in a vision from a Macedonian man. He goes into Macedonia and has great success in spreading the Gospel.

C. Romans 1:8-15 & Acts 25:1-28:31

1. Lastly, we see that Paul has the destination in mind of going to Rome so that he can encourage those brethren through the preaching and teaching of the Gospel.
2. However, this plans are hampered by the winds of not being able to make it out there before being arrested in Jerusalem and accused of causing a riot.
3. But...Paul is resolved to make it to Rome and he does so through appealing to Caesar (after appearing before Festus & Agrippa) for his case to be heard. This will get Paul fast tracked to Rome, but he will make his way there as a prisoner. Even a literal storm that causes a shipwreck on Malta doesn't stop Paul from making it to Rome from where he does some great Gospel work even while being under house arrest.

We see these three components of Josh's quote within the life of Paul, so what is it that we come away realizing and understanding about how we ought to approach our own journeys in life?

II. The Destination:

A. The destination is our goal...what we hope to accomplish.

1. It is very easy to recognize that Paul was a very determined man during his life as an Apostle, but this was even true prior to Jesus being His Lord. His destinations that he was working towards in this life all centered around the goals that he sought to accomplish. In the same way, we need to recognize that the destinations we have set course for in this life correlate with the goals that we are hoping to accomplish.
2. Some of those goals might not be all that serious in nature, but other goals might be life determining. Thinking just of my own life, I can think back to college and identify the goals I had of graduating with my degree in Recreation & Sport Management and going on to work in the world of sports. That was my destination and my goal for my life from the perspective of what I would do for work in order to support myself and a future family. But an even greater goal was that of wanting to be a strong disciple and contribute to the local church in a meaningful way. Those were my three main goals in life...sports, family, disciple.
3. However, what I learned as time went on was that my goals were not necessarily going to work well together the way I had planned, and we need to see that as being a possibility within our lives. Think about it from Paul's perspective in those first two texts. In the first text, Paul wanted to please God and he thought he would do so through the persecuting of Christians. However, he quickly learned that these two things were not going to work out together. He had a goal, but realized that it wasn't the right goal to have. Still... he had goals and he was working to achieve those goals when he came upon some strong winds.

B. Have we firmly established our goals for this life?

1. Before we shift focus to the winds, I want us to first recognize the simple need for goals. We need to know what we are striving for in this life. Without well thought-out and determined goals...we'll probably find ourselves simply spinning our wheels and not going anywhere. It is extremely difficult to be successful when we don't have the goals of success clearly defined.
2. However, we also need to keep in mind that our goals might need to be altered. This was seen in the life of Paul as he went from being "*a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an arrogant man*" (**I Timothy 1:13**) to being a strong follower of Jesus and even an Apostle. Goals are good, but we need to make sure that our set destinations are where they need to be. Looking back at my destinations and goals of being a partner in sport, husband/father, and contributing disciple in the local church...these were good, but I would eventually realize through some winds that came into my life that only some of these destinations were the proper course for me in my life.

III. The Wind:

A. The wind represents those times when our efforts to accomplish our goal are impeded.

1. Paul's winds that he faced caused a couple of different reactions from him, and the same can be true within our own lives. Let's notice first that the first two chapters we looked at from Paul's life actually show him allowing the winds to change his destination in order to accomplish the proper and better goal. He changed course from being a persecutor to be a follower and from going into Asia and Bithynia to going into Macedonia in which he planted a church in Philippi which led to the incredibly encouraging letter of Philippians being written.
2. But we also see an instance where Paul's destination was dead-set and he wasn't willing to be knocked off course by whatever wind was blown his way. He greatly desired to go to Rome so that he might be of great encouragement to the brethren who were in that city. He was hindered on a number of occasions from doing so, but then he finally has opportunity to go to Rome...but it requires him to go in chains. Even as he is making that trip he is literally shipwrecked by a strong storm. He eventually does make it to Rome, but even though he has reached that destination...he finds himself without his usual freedom to go about his normal business of preaching and teaching. The winds were doing everything they could to knock this focused man off of his course.
3. The same things can happen to us and do happen to us in this life. Again looking at my life, I can think back and see the winds that were pushing against me. Some of those winds ended up being positive in nature, but some of them were pushing me in a negative direction. I think first about the winds that pushed against my desires to being a contributing disciple within the local church. The goals I was pursuing in the world of sports just wasn't going to allow me to accomplish the other goals I had in mind. They might have worked out for others, but it wasn't going to work out for myself. Then entered the other wind of pushing me in the direction of preaching. At that point, I had a decision to make. Which of those winds was going to win out in having the most influence on me? Would I continue on or just give up all together when it came to my goals I had set? Which direction would I choose?

B. Do we allow the wind to cause us to quit and give up?

1. That's the thing about the winds and storms that lean against us in this life...we have to determine whether they are going to positively impact us in what we are trying to accomplish or are they going to have a negative impact. They could be positive in the sense that they are helping us realize that what we are wanting to do isn't the right thing to do. Maybe we come to realize from outside influences that our goals aren't well thought out or what is best for us. Or it could be that the winds of life are trying to keep us from accomplishing good and worthwhile goals that we are hoping to establish.
2. I would say that there are some winds that arise that are simply a product of the ebbs and flows of life. However, I am definitely open to the idea that there are deep forces at work in this life that come as a result of the evil one's desires for our spiritual failure. What better way for him to hold my spirituality in check than to help put me in a situation where I can't be as spiritually involved in a local church family because of my particular involvement in sport? But there are also the instances where the Lord's providential care helped send a wind that influenced me to go in the direction that led me to where I am today. I can't say for certain beyond recognizing that we are most certainly involved in a struggle for our souls as the same Paul writes in **Ephesians 6:10-20**.
3. Though we might not be certain from where the different winds of life come, we ought to be certain that we simply don't allow them to keep us from doing nothing and giving up all together! Through proper consideration of our goals that are based upon God's desire for us and a whole lot of prayer, we can recognize the proper goals to set and adjust our sails to use whatever wind is blowing against us in order to reach the proper destination.

IV. Our Sails:

A. We can't control the wind, but we can control our response to it.

1. This is vitally important to consider because this is the only thing that we truly have any control over. We only have control over how we respond to the winds and storms of life. Paul had no control over Jesus appearing to him on the way to Damascus. He had no control over what the Holy Spirit was

prompting him to do. He had no control over the hatred of the Jews that led him to be arrested. However, he had all the control in the world over how he responded in those situations. He could respond to Jesus. He could respond to the Holy Spirit. He could respond to the hatred and the chains. And he did those very things to the tune of the best outcomes possible being realized.

2. As I look back on my life over the past ten or so years, I can see a number of instances where I didn't respond well to the different winds that raged against me. Sometimes, I simply felt sorry for myself and did nothing. Sometimes, I allowed the winds to push me in the direction of straight up foolishness that only led to greater heartache. But then there were those times when I wisened up and used those winds to get me to a better place than I was before.

B. Are we resolved to reach our destination regardless of the wind?

1. I am thankful for the patience of God who continually helps me to improve more and more in responding better to the winds of life. I am confident that He has carried me to where I am today, and for that I am eternally grateful for what He has done in my life. Can you say the same? Can you look back in your life and see the gracious hand of God leading you to where you are today? Were there winds that led you away from destinations that you can see now as being a detriment to you? Can you see winds that have positively impacted you? Have you experienced winds that seem to simply try to knock you off a good and well-established course that is taking you to where you need to be? If you have seen those winds then you recognize that they weren't of God, but He was still there strengthening you to stand strong against them! Each of us face winds in this life...the question always comes to back to how we respond to them.
2. Let's bring this really close to home for every single one of us. How have you responded to this wind that is the crisis of COVID-19? Every single person here has felt that wind in one way or another. Each of us here has at the very least felt the wind of not being able to come together as a church family as we are right now. Have you allowed for that wind to knock you off the course of making sure that the Lord's Day continued to be the Lord's? Did you allow the inability to meet to free up this day in order for you to simply have another day to yourself? Or did you continue to do the best you could to give special focus and attention to Him on this His day each first day of the week? It is my true hope that we all continued a steady course for allowing the Lord's Day to be His during this time, but if maybe we strayed off course...what better day than today to get on track once again for we don't know when a wind might come that causes us to sudden arrive at the destination in which we are heading.

I've talked this morning about the providential care that God provides within our lives. And while it is wise to not speak with certainty about that which we cannot be certain, I am most confident that the Lord knew that we would all benefit immensely from coming to know these words that were written by Josh in his copy of His Word. These words are life shaping, and I do hope that these considerations this morning have caused us to consider our own life journeys, where we are headed, the winds that most certainly lie ahead, and the way that we plan on responding to such winds. As we close this morning, may we conclude with the words of this same Paul who we have focused so greatly on this morning. May his thoughts in the letter to the Philippians pair together well with these words shared with our dear brother. May all of these thoughts together lead each and every one of us to being where I am confident my friends are this very morning...the destination in which they had set their course and that they were ready at all times to adjust their sails to reach...to be in the very presence of their Lord Jesus.

"Not that I have already reached the goal or am already perfect, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:12-14)