

## Pentecost 5—B

### Acts 27:13-26

## Relax! Nothing is Under Your Control

If I would ask you to define “sin,” most would probably say that sin is disobedience to God. And that is absolutely true. But where does sin come from? The devil. But in what way? He doesn’t typically appear to us in person or visibly. Rather, he makes his presence known in lies. You see, disobeying God is never good. It’s not even logical or rational. So why do we do it? We do it because we believe Satan’s lies. The Bible says he is a liar and the father of lies.

So when you sin and you wonder how you ever came to commit such a sin, analyze the situation by asking yourself: “What lie am I believing that is leading me to sin?”

- A person skips church, doesn’t read the Bible, or take time for prayer because they believe the lie that they’re already strong enough, or God isn’t important enough.
- A person disrespects authority because they believe the lie that a person who has authority has to earn the right to have authority over me.
- A woman has an abortion because she believes the lie that that life is not yet human, or that her life is more important than the baby’s.
- A person expresses their sexuality in whatever way they please because they believe that it is their body and they have a right to do so. Ultimately, it’s a lie.
- A person steals because they believe the lie that more stuff will make them a happier person.
- A person gossips about others because he believes the lie that my reputation will drift higher as I lower the reputation of others.

Here is a lie we all commonly believe. It is a lie that eventually gives us great tension and stress. It’s a lie that ultimately can lead you to hopelessness and despair. The lie is this: “My life is mine, and I control it.” And so we believe this lie: “Relax: Everything is under control.” If you’ve got all things under your control, then you can relax. And behind that lie are other lies.

**First lie: I am the best person to control my life, God cannot be trusted.** Even if everything was under our control and we could make everything play out exactly as we wanted it to, the results still wouldn’t be what was best for us. We don’t have enough information available to us to control things in the ideal way. The lie is that God cannot be trusted with the control of our life. That lie goes back to the Garden of Eden. *“You will be like God!”* “Take control of this situation, Adam and Eve. God has purposely held something back from you. You just need to take it.”

**Second lie: I am able to control most things in life.** We can’t control the daily events of our life. We can’t control other people (even though we try.) We can’t control when we get sick. We can’t control when accidents or disasters happen. And here’s the kicker: we can’t even control ourselves always. How many times just in the last week did we lose control of ourselves? Said things we shouldn’t have said. Did something you shouldn’t have done. Failed to get some things done that were essential, and had we controlled ourselves and our schedule better, they would have gotten done. If we truly had control of ourselves, during the past week we would have exercised like we should have, eaten only healthy foods, had only positive and encouraging conversations, thought only happy, optimistic thoughts.

Now, I’m not saying we are merely pawns in this world, or puppets. I am not teaching fatalism. God has given us a measure of control. He has given us a will to exercise. We can do evil and bring harm, or we can be a benefit to others around us and make a positive difference.

Nevertheless, my point stands: we believe the lie that we can control far more than we are actually able to control.

**Third lie: If things aren't under control, I cannot relax.** That attitude is a sin. My experience has been that sooner or later, God allows circumstances into our lives that shine a bright spotlight on that lie. He allows events in our lives that at least for a time make impossible for us to keep on believing that we are in control.

So to address these sins, let's look at a time when people learned they were not in control. We're about to pick up a story in the middle, so I'll need to give you some background. This story is actually one of the longest in the Bible. It goes all the way back to Acts 21 and goes until the end of the book, chapter 28. It's one long episode. It's a detailed and incredible story that is really easy to read and well worth the time. It'll take you less than 40 minutes. Acts 21 to the end of the book. Long story short, Paul was falsely accused and imprisoned. He was ultimately kept in prison more than 2 years when the Roman ruler who was holding him was replaced by another ruler. He brought Paul up to find out about this guy sitting in prison. Paul appealed to Caesar, kind of like an appeal to the Supreme Court in our country. As a Roman citizen, they had no choice but to grant his request, and so they made arrangements to ship him off to Rome for his trial there. And that gets us to chapter 27. I'm not going to spoil all the details; you'll have to read it yourself.

So, they need to get Paul to Rome. They turn him over to a centurion named Julius (what else?) who belonged to the "Imperial Regiment." This probably meant he was highly trained, and perhaps he typically had the duty of protecting the Caesar. Maybe he was in town on other business and was heading back to Rome, so Paul and some other prisoners were placed under his care to get to Rome safely. Their journey starts near the south-eastern corner of the Mediterranean Sea. As they travel, they had unfavorable winds and it was slow and difficult going. They eventually arrived on the island of Crete, which is south of the Greece mainland. But Paul's ship sailed to south side of Crete and anchored in a place called Fair Havens. By all appearances, this was an inappropriate name. We have some of those in America, too. Apple Valley, CA has parched sand and cacti, but no apples. There's a town in Utah named Hurricane, but it's never had one. There's a town named Brilliant in Ohio, but people who have visited claim that "Brilliant" is a bit of an exaggeration. So Fair Havens seems to be misnamed as well, because the town was neither fair nor an especially safe haven since the experienced sailors did not think suitable to spend the winter. They didn't want to go far, just another 40 miles or so west on the island of Crete was a town called Phoenix with a harbor that was much more protected. And everyone knows it's far more preferable to winter in Phoenix. Right? That's common knowledge today as well. However, it was already October and they were into the dangerous season for sailing. Paul, the prisoner who didn't really get a vote, nevertheless strongly warned them not try to set sail. They didn't listen to him and set sail anyway. And this is where we pick it up.

Altogether, 276 people boarded the ship (so it's not a small one) and here's what happened: "*When a gentle south wind began to blow, they thought they could carry out their plan*" (13). It was easy to manage the gentle wind. Coming from the south, it would not push them away from shore. They could just comfortably make their way 40 miles to the south and winter in Phoenix. "*They raised the anchor and sailed close to the shore of Crete. But before long, a hurricane-like wind, called the "northeaster," rushed down from the island*" (13-14). That time of year, the Mediterranean is known for its quick shifts in weather. This is the very reason sailing ships avoided sailing this time of year. "*Since the ship was caught in it and could*

*not head into the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along*” (15). It was impossible to go in the direction they wanted to go. There was no way they would get to Phoenix. *“As we sailed on the sheltered side of a small island called Cauda,”* (not far from Crete) *“we were barely able to secure the skiff”* (16). So they got a little relief from the storm with shelter the island provided. They took that time to secure the lifeboat. It was a skiff, row boat, dingy, or tender (lots of names for it) that was used to ferry people to shore in an emergency. Obviously, just one for 276 people meant that ship safety back then was not what it is today. The skiff was typically towed it behind the boat. With the storm and waves, it was probably taking on water or had already begun to sink. Hoisting it onboard was a difficult process and the passengers were apparently helping since the writer, Luke, says *“we.”* *“We were barely able to secure the skiff.”*

*“After hoisting it on board, the men tied ropes around the ship to reinforce it”* (17). The hulls of most wooden boats back then were made with tongue-in-groove wood planks. When the sea became violent, the planks could separate, flooding the ship with water and sinking it. So they passed strong ropes under the ship and winched them tight, a process called “frapping” and it was essentially to tie the boat together in a heavy storm.

*“Then, fearing that they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis”* (sandbars off of North Africa), *“they lowered the sea anchor and in this way were driven along. Because we were tossed around so violently by the storm, the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard”* (17-18). Now this is how you know just how serious things were. This was their paycheck and bank account. When you start tossing your money into the sea, you know it’s bad. But they had to make the boat lighter to make sure it stayed afloat. *“On the third day, they threw the ship’s gear overboard with their own hands”* (19). It got even worse. Now the very equipment needed to drive and steer the boat were also thrown overboard; an absolutely desperate situation. *“When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the violent storm kept pressing down on us, finally all hope that we would be saved was disappearing”* (20). The 276 souls on board the boat have hit rock bottom. They realized there was absolutely nothing else they could do. The situation was 100% beyond their control. So they gave up all hope. They believed it was just a matter of time before they all died.

So now Paul spoke. *“After they had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up among them and said, ‘Men, you should have followed my advice and not set sail from Crete and avoided this damage and loss’* (21). Maybe not the best time for an “I told you so” moment. Then again, he’s calling attention to his words. *“You didn’t listen to me once. Perhaps you’ll listen to what I say now. So, listen carefully and believe me this time! “But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because there will be no loss of life among you. Only the ship will be lost”* (22). Do you see how specific this prophecy was? What is the likelihood that a ship could be completely destroyed in a storm with 276 people on board, some of whom could not swim, yet not one person would die?

*“In fact, last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand before Caesar. And surely God has graciously given you all those who are sailing with you’* (23-24). For sake of Paul, God would spare the lives of all. How cool is that? How many lives does God spare on a daily basis because of the Christians that are nearby? *“So keep up your courage, men, because I believe God that it will be exactly the way I have been told. However, we must run aground on some island”* (25-26). We’ll run aground. The ship will be destroyed. All the people will be saved. Believe this! If you kept reading, you would hear how Paul encouraged the men to eat. Then everything plays out just like he said it would. The ship ran aground and was broken to pieces.

Those who could swim swam for shore. Those who couldn't grab planks from the breaking ship. And all 276 made it to shore.

How did Paul do it? Paul had come to a point in his life where he recognized that he was not in control. Nothing was under his control. And he recognized that was a good thing. God was in control.

Are you there? Listen: for your sins of poorly controlling what you can. For believing the lie that you can control far more than you truly can, or that you are somehow ultimately in control. For the sin of believing that only when you are in control can you relax. For the sin of believing that God cannot be trusted with your present or your future, repent. Recognize the harm these lies are causing you, and the grief they are causing your God. Repent, and plead to God for his mercy.

And know this: You have a Savior, a rescuer who took control of your out-of-control sins. You have a Savior whose truth pierces through the lies. You have a perfect substitute who perfectly trusted that his Father was controlling all things for his good plans and purposes. *"Your will be done."* You have a Savior who went to the cross for you. He paid your penalty in full. He died in your place. He took the Father's wrath. For your control issues, know this: you have a Savior who forgives you.

Knowing and believing this, when you are in situations in life when it becomes crystal clear that you are not in control, you can still relax, still have peace, still have confidence—just like Paul.

1. Listen to the Word of God—his promises. (Not as specific as the Word to Paul, but just as comforting.)
2. Never give up! Remain confident in the Lord. (Because of God's promises. You know who he is. You know what he's done for you.)
3. Encourage others, and direct them to the Lord. *"Keep up your courage! Eat!"* During times when your life is out of control, you are in the perfect position to lead others to Christ.
4. Lead by example. Often times we're in crisis together. Your example of faith and trust will help others and lead them to the Lord.

Can you imagine how our lives would be different if every day we spent time in prayer and acknowledged that God is the one who is truly in control? If we meditated on his goodness? If we were reassured daily of his love and acceptance? If you daily were convinced again that you truly are his own dear child and he really is your loving Father. How would your day be different if you started it fully believing that this day, all the circumstances, all the events, all the relationships, everything is ultimately and finally in the hands of your loving, all-powerful Creator, who also loved you enough to send his one and only Son to take control of Satan, your sin, and the your impending death. He took control of it all, lived for you a perfect life, died on the cross for all the lies you believe and the sins that result. He rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father ruling over all things, controlling all things for the benefit of his body, the church, of which you are a member. What if you knew and believed that with full confidence. Is there anything that could happen that would terrify you or even disturb you?

Knowing and believing that nothing is under your control, but everything is truly under God's control, wouldn't that truly enable you to relax? My prayer is just that. That you will recognize that you are not in control. But God is. Go in peace and confidence. Relax. God has got this! Amen.

Hymns: 433, 415