

“WHEN SHIPWRECKS THREATEN”

Ezekiel 26:1-6, I Timothy 1:12-19, Acts 27:27-44

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Charles Spurgeon speaks on Faith. He says: “Look at the faith of the master mariner! He looses his cable, he streams away from the land. For days, weeks, even months, he sees neither sail nor shore, yet on he goes day and night without fear, till one morning he finds himself exactly opposite the desired haven toward which he has been steering.

“How has he found his way over the trackless deep? He has trusted his compass, his nautical almanac, his glasses, and the heavenly bodies; and obeying their guidance, without sighting land, he has steered so accurately that he has not changed a point to enter port.

“It is a wonderful thing...It is glorious to be so far out on the ocean of Divine love, believing in God, and steering for Heaven straight away, by the direction of the Word of God.”¹

This is very true, that there is great joy in being in trusting service to the Lord our God in our world today. But what happens when, in the middle of our journey, a storm wreaks havoc on our lives and we find ourselves sorely tested and tried? What happens when the worries and concerns of the world overwhelms us to the point of panic and desperation? What do we do when we are so surrounded by chaos and disaster that we lose all hope of not only survival, but enduring faith? And what happens when we can no longer find our way through the clouds of doubt and the darkness of sin and “*neither sun nor stars appear*” (Acts 27:20) to help us guide our way?

There are so many options for us to choose from. Will we seek the help of other people around us, trusting in their strength and energy to bring us back into stability? Will we rely upon our riches, or our security, or our properties to fall back upon? Will we turn to the ways of the world, to alcohol or drugs or sexual immorality, to take our minds off of our problems? Will we

¹ (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 284)

trust the government to supply us with all our needs? Or will we turn to social services to grant us encouragement? Those are the world's options for us.

But friends, these things cannot help us! However, if we keep our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ through it all, and let Him supply us with all our needs, then that is the faith that will get us through! Jesus will never fail us, but will encourage and support us through all the storms of life so that we might find safety and hope in Him. And if we can make the best use of our tragedy to live and express the hope we have in Christ Jesus, our tested faith finds fulfillment. That's what Charles Spurgeon is talking about, depending upon the Lord Jesus so much that no matter what we have to face in this life, we have a sure foundation upon which to stand.

And that is what we see in our Scripture lessons today. Ezekiel was a prophet to both Israel and Judah, trying to call the people back into a relationship with the Lord our God. He desperately tried to show the people that dependence upon anything or anyone else EXCEPT the Lord is pure foolishness. Ezekiel did his best to call the people to trust in the Lord God Almighty and to follow all of His ways so that disaster and conquest would be eliminated.

The lesson of Ezekiel 26 and 27 helps us to see the alternative to keeping our faith in the Lord our God. In these chapters, Ezekiel prophesies against the City of Tyre because they refused to recognize the work of the Lord in the lands of Israel and Judah. Rather than support God's people, Tyre spoke against Jerusalem, and not only took delight in its misfortune, but took advantage of its fall. The inhabitants of Tyre all looked at how they might prosper from the fall of the Jewish nations.

But God is not One to be mocked and not give back His wrath to those who mock Him. Ezekiel told the people of Tyre how God would enable Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, to invade and ravage the city because of their disdain for Him. God gave the city of Tyre over to

the conquest of Babylon to be completely destroyed because of their contempt for the nation of Israel. Their refusal to aid and support Israel brought the city to complete destruction, with nothing but a flat plain left in which to dry fishing nets (Ezekiel 26:4-5).

The people of Tyre had trusted in their opulence, their government, their chief trading port, and their industry of ship building and transportation. They did not recognize the Almighty God, but worshipped human imagined pagan gods and goddesses made of stone or metal. And because they refused to follow the Lord God Almighty, and decided to take advantage of Jerusalem's destruction, God gave them up to the Babylonians, and all their trading ships were wrecked or sunk and destroyed by the storms in the sea. What once they thought of as a beautiful and powerful city, became ruined. Nations today would do well to learn this concept.

Paul, on the other hand, had the chance to invite and encourage many others to trust in the Lord Jesus as their Savior, so that they might not experience the shipwrecks of faith. While not everyone accepted his teaching to follow Jesus, his own life was an example of all that was possible when one turned from the things of this world and followed the Lord Jesus instead.

He tells Timothy, *"Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - of which I am the worst"* (I Tim. 1:15). His life had been turned around from being *"a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man"* (1:13), to one who became a servant of the Lord Jesus by the grace and mercy of God. He became a devoted follower of God's Messiah, Jesus, and lived the rest of his life as a witness to the blessings and goodness that God provides if we keep our trust and faith in Jesus.

But that didn't mean that Paul would have a life without trials and struggles. Because he served Jesus, the world turned against him, and did its best to destroy him. But because he trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ, he received guidance, protection, provision and blessing in order

to continue serving as His witness.

Today, we see the result of the storm in Paul's life, but we also see God's protection. Listen to the next section of our study of the Book of Acts. This is Acts 27:27-44 (READ Acts 27:27-44).

For two weeks the storm continued to rage over the ship that Paul was on going toward Rome. However he had been promised, by an angel of the Lord, that he would be kept safe, along with all of the others on that ship. So Paul, in faith to that promise, did his best to encourage the other 275 men on the ship. Even when they got closer to shore, Paul was there to give guidance to those aboard so that everyone could make it to safety. But they had to run the ship aground. The ship would become wrecked, but the lives of everyone on board would be protected. Paul told them, "*Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head*" (27:34).

We see that very thing happening in our world, today, too. Our lives turn up-side-down with troubles and struggles, but when we keep our trust in Jesus, knowing that He knows where we are and what is going on around us, He comes through and provides astounding results.

Listen to this account. "In her book, *It's My Turn*, Ruth Bell Graham tells a story about her growing-up-days in Tsingkiang, China, where her father was a missionary physician. The business manager at the local hospital told about a jolly gentleman named Mr. Kao Er. One day as he attended prayer meeting, bandits broke into his house and kidnapped his two children, an eight-year-old son and a baby daughter.

"As word spread, the local Christians and missionaries gathered in earnest prayer. Never one to miss an opportunity to witness, Mr. Kao Er had a large sign painted and posted in front of the hospital gate. It said, in effect: *The bandits have kidnapped our children and have demanded a thousand yuan ransom. I am not a wealthy man. I cannot pay a thousand yuan. I cannot pay*

five hundred yuan. I cannot even pay fifty yuan. But I believe God. If it is His will, He is able to bring my children back without any ransom.

“Passersby were amazed by his message, and it was widely expected that the children would be quickly killed.

“Weeks passed, and in the course of time a band of soldiers broke in upon the hive of bandits. As they pursued them, they heard a sound from the ditch beside the road. One soldier stopped to look, and there he found a skeleton-like child lying in the ditch where the bandits had hastily thrown him. It was Mr. Kao Er’s son. He had been imprisoned under a large overturned vessel, and was on the brink of starvation. But he was alive, and he recovered. But what of the baby girl?

“Later there was another battle between the bandits and the soldiers. This time, the wife of the bandit chief was captured, and she was found nursing two babies - not twins - too near in age to both be her own. The daughter, too, was returned to her parents.

“Ruth recalls, ‘Sitting one Sunday in the little gray-brick Chinese church, I watched as Mr. Kao Er, carrying his still-too-weak-to-walk son, and his wife, carrying the now healthy, chubby baby girl, walked forward to publicly give thanks to God and to dedicate both children to Him.’² What a testimony of faith when everything turns up-side-down!

Folks, craziness in our world happens, and as we put our trust in The Lord Jesus, amazing things will come about. The presumed dead will rise again; the lost will be found; the kidnapped will be returned; the unjustly treated person will find redemption; the murdered will find life; the weak will become strong; the humble will be lifted up; the sick will be made well; and the meek will inherit the earth.

² (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, pg. 285)

As we let Jesus Christ become Lord of our life, giving Him control of everything that happens to us, we may have to face shipwreck and storm, but He will guide us to even greater things as we walk with Him as our Savior. The results of our lives may turn out to be much different than what we have planned for our lives, but when we trust that Jesus will lead us and protect us, those results will always be found to bring glory and honor to the Lord.

Paul trusted that what he had been told would come true. Though the men onboard the ship didn't believe in him right away, he kept telling them the things of the Lord God. He kept offering direction to the Centurion, Julius, and Julius began to trust him, as did the others. But even then, some of the sailors wanted to save themselves, and attempted to abandon ship in the lifeboat. Without the sailors to pilot and operate the ship, it would have been certain ruin for everyone. I'm not sure why they thought the lifeboat would be much safer than the larger ship, but in the middle of stress and turmoil, sound thinking is not always common.

So the greater Paul lived his faith during the hurricane, the more the others began looking at him for direction and wisdom. He had noticed that the men had not eaten much during those two weeks of storm, so as they grew closer to shore, he invited them to eat something to keep up their strength so that they would be able to endure the final steps to safety. *"...he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves"* (27:35-36). Paul modeled Jesus' action in praying, then breaking the bread and then eating. Sounds a lot like a communion service, doesn't it? And it touched the lives of all of the others so that they also ate and gained strength.

They listened to Paul and as the dawn came, they saw an island upon which they might find safety. So they cut *"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” (27:40). Everything Paul had said was coming true, and they did everything they could to get to that unknown island. Please notice that the ship was on autopilot all during the storm, being driven just as God directed. Only when land was spotted did they take the ship off of autopilot and direct it toward the beach within the bay.

That’s important for each of us to know, too. When the storms in our lives overwhelm us, it is always best to let God take the controls and lead us where He wills to grant us the destination He has already plotted for us. If we give ourselves over to God’s autopilot, He will always take us to where He desires us to be. And rarely are we disappointed in His destination.

But one more thing gets in the way of the ship making it safely - a sandbar. The bow of the ship is caught by that sandbar, and the stern is battered to pieces by the raging waves. But by then they were close enough to swim or float to shore, using the wreckage of the ship to give them safe passage to the beach. *“In this way everyone reached land safely”* (27:44).

God fulfilled His prophecy to Paul. Every person was saved, but the ship was ruined. Paul had predicted it and it came true just as God had told him. God is Always faithful to His promises, people! Don’t doubt Him! Stay true to Him in your faith!

But many times we fail to accept God’s promises. Take for example “A man [who] slipped and fell off a cliff while hiking on a mountaintop. Luckily he was able to grab a branch on his way down. Holding on for dear life, he looked down only to see a rock valley some fifteen hundred feet below. When he looked it was twenty feet to the cliff where he had fallen.

“Panicked, he yelled, ‘Help! Help! Is anybody there? Help!’

“A booming voice spoke up. ‘I am here, and I will save you if you believe in Me.’

“I believe! I believe!’ yelled back the man.

“If you believe in Me, let go of the branch and then I will save you.’

“The young man, hearing what the voice said, looked down again. Seeing the rock valley below, he quickly looked back up and shouted, ‘Is there anybody else up there?!’”³

Without faith, it is impossible for us to please God (Hebrews 11:6) AND to find His great power at work. When the shipwrecks happen in our lives, we are so prone to disregard God’s authority and power, only to turn to the weaker and unreliable things of this world. But think of the witness that this man would have had if he had taken God at His word and been miraculously saved by Him? Those who heard about it could only think him being nuts about making up such a wild story. Or they would marvel at the miraculous rescue from the Lord.

And that may be what people thought as each of these 276 men retold this spectacular event. They would have been thought of as either marvelous storytellers, weaving such a yarn. Or they would have marveled those listening to the great things that God had done when the shipwreck threatened their lives. I hope our accounts of what God has done in our lives is equally spectacular so that others come to know the value of trusting the Lord Jesus Christ with their lives. It’s our story to tell. Let’s pray.

Father, we thank You so much for Your intervention into our lives. We thank You for the storms You have brought us through as we let You take the rudder of our life and direct us to safety. Thank You for Jesus, our Savior, who has provided us with the safety we all need from the wages of sin, which is death. Jesus paid the price for our sin so that we might **all** have life in Him. So let us trust in Him to be our Pilot and Guide and Friend to take us to the safety of Your heavenly kingdom. Give us the courage to trust Jesus with our whole life. And then give us the courage to share all that He has done for us with those around us so that they, too, may find life in Him. This we pray in the Great and Powerful Name of Jesus. AMEN.

³ (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, pg. 289)