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A TEMPEST-TOSSED PRISONER OF HOPE

– ACTS 27:1-26. – *OCTOBER 31*. –

Golden Text: – "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass." – Psa. 37:5.

FESTUS, governor of Judea, sent St. Paul and other prisoners to Rome, the former with no derogatory charges against him. There was no direct intercourse between Rome and the little port of Caesarea; hence for a distance of six hundred miles the journey was made by a small trading vessel. This journey lasted from about the middle of August to September 1st – good speed for a sailing vessel in those days, but the weather was fine. At Myra, St. Paul and two of the brethren who accompanied him (Luke and Aristarchus) and the guard and the other prisoners were transferred to an Egyptian vessel laden with a cargo of wheat, enroute for Rome and bearing a considerable number of passengers besides the crew – in all two hundred and seventy-six persons. The pleasant weather continued for several days and then it became stormy. The vessel abandoned her intended route to get into the lea of the Island of Crete and tarried at the port of Fair Havens for better weather. Thus they were delayed until about October 1st, the Jewish New Year's Day and a fast day and the time for equinoctial storms.

St. Paul drew attention to the dangers of continuing the journey and advised that they winter there, but those in authority concluded that they would go to Phenice, a larger port. But before they had gone far a northeast wind (typhonic) struck the vessel suddenly and they were obliged to go with the wind to the southward and came under the shelter of the little Island Cauda. Here they undergirded the ship by placing chains and ropes under her keel, because the weight of the cargo of wheat and the severity of the storm had strained her. They lowered the gearing

of the sails and continued to drive before the wind, guarding against sand banks. The ship labored heavily in the storm; part of her cargo was thrown overboard; later on she was further lightened by casting overboard her heavier furniture, tackle, etc. The storm continued for several days. Neither sun nor stars were visible, and the captain could not tell his whereabouts, for the compass had not yet been invented. Hence all aboard were gradually abandoning hope. They had ceased to eat and were almost in despair.

Then came the opportunity for St. Paul's message of cheer. He reminded them that they should have followed his advice and stayed at Fair Havens and not have sustained the loss and injury. But he bade them be of good cheer, for their lives would all be preserved, though the ship be destroyed. In explanation of his confidence he related that the angel of God whom he served stood by him in the night saying, "Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar; and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it [R4506 : page 328] shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit we must be cast upon a desert island."

CALM IN A TIME OF STORM

The true Christian in proper relationship with the Lord has at all times "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding," ruling in his heart. It was St. Paul who sang praises to God in the prison at Philippi, who was composed and ready to speak to the people after being mobbed at Jerusalem, who was also the composed one in the tempest on the Mediterranean Sea. While St. Paul was indeed a stalwart follower of Jesus, with whom few, if any, could stand comparison, nevertheless the same principle holds with respect to every sincere child of God. If their triumphs of faith are less heroic than those of the Apostle, so also their trials are proportionately less severe. The Christian has much

advantage every way. He has the promise of God, not only as respects the life that now is, but also re the life to come.

"JESUS SAVIOR PILOT ME OVER LIFE'S TEMPESTUOUS SEA"

"The voyage of life" frequently resembles the one of this study. It may start out with summer suns and every prospect favorable, but, ere long, the trials and difficulties of life sweep down as a storm – financial or social or moral tests come upon the individual to drive him from his intended course. His purposes thwarted, his heart overwhelmed with dismay and almost in despair he finds himself the more ready to hear the message from on high, speaking peace and telling him of a fair haven at last. Nevertheless it can be reached only through the wrecking of the earthen vessel, and Divine providence alone can effect the ultimate salvation. Happy are those who shall ultimately be saved even "through great tribulation," as the companions of God's "peculiar people," represented by St. Paul. (Rev. 7:14.) But still more happy, more blessed will be the 144,000 who now have in the stormy times the fellowship of God and through sore tribulation shall enter the Millennial Kingdom as Joint-Heirs of the Lord. It will be through their instrumentality under God that their companions in the storm of life may ultimately be saved. – Rom. 11:31.

Ah, yes, we do well to heed the exhortation of our Golden Text, "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass." He shall bring to pass blessings and peace, even in the midst of the storms of life, and he shall bring to pass eventually for these glory, honor and immortality through Christ.

May we not adapt Longfellow's majestic words:

Thou, too, sail on, O Ship the Great!
Sail on, O Church, be strong and wait!

Humanity with all its fears,
With all the hopes of future years,
Is hanging breathless on thy fate!
We know what Master laid thy keel,
What Workman wrought thy ribs of steel,
Who made each mast, and sail, and rope,
What anvils rang, what hammers beat,
In what a forge and what a heat,
Were shaped the anchors of thy hope!

Fear not each sudden sound and shock;
'Tis of the wave and not the rock;
'Tis but the flapping of the sail,
And not a rent made by the gale.
In spite of rock and tempest roar,
In spite of false lights on the shore,
Sail on, nor fear to breast the sea!
Our hearts, our hopes, are all with thee,
Our hearts, our hopes, our prayers, our tears,
Our faith triumphant o'er our fears,
Are all with thee – are all with thee!

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