

THE VOYAGE TO ROME

– OCTOBER 29. – ACTS 27:13-26. –

ST. PAUL SENT TO THE IMPERIAL CAPITAL – A STORMY VOYAGE – DAYS OF TRIAL AND TESTING – THE APOSTLE ENCOURAGED BY A VISION – "GOD MOVES IN A MYSTERIOUS WAY" – THE SAILORS CHEERED BY THE HELPFUL SPIRIT OF THE APOSTLE – LESSONS FROM HIS EXPERIENCES.

"Commit thy way unto Jehovah; trust also in Him, and He will bring it to pass." – Psalm 37:5.

NOT LONG after St. Paul's discourse before Festus and King Agrippa, opportunity was afforded for sending the Apostle and other prisoners to Rome under a strong guard. There were no derogatory charges preferred against St. Paul, however. 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 in a small trading vessel.

This journey lasted from about the middle of August to September 1 – 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 – St. Luke and Aristarchus – were transferred, along with the other prisoners and the guard, to an Egyptian vessel laden with a cargo of wheat and en route for Rome. Besides the crew, this vessel bore a considerable number of passengers – in all, two hundred and seventy-six persons.

For several days the pleasant weather continued, and then it became stormy. The vessel abandoned her intended route in order to get under the lee of the island of Crete, and tarried at the port of Fair Havens for better weather. Thus they were delayed until about

October 1, the time for equinoctial storms. St. Paul drew attention to the dangers of continuing the journey, and advised that they winter there. His opinion may have been the result of some inspiration, but quite possibly was merely his own judgment of the weather, etc. He had already had large experience in seeing disasters, as we are informed in one of his Epistles written previous to this time. (2 Corinthians 11:25.) Besides, his trade as a sail-maker would naturally bring him into contact with sailors, and interest him in all matters pertaining to the craft.

But those in authority concluded to go to Phenice, a larger port. Before they had gone far, however, a typhonic northeast wind struck the vessel suddenly; and they were obliged to go with the wind southward and came under the shelter of the little island called Clauda. Here they undergirded the ship by placing chains and ropes under her keel, because the weight of the cargo and the severity of the storm had strained her. Then 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; and later she was further lightened by casting overboard her heavier furniture, tackle, etc.

DAYS OF TRIAL AND DANGER

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 on board were gradually abandoning all hope. They had ceased to eat, and were almost in despair.

During those fourteen days the Apostle had abundant opportunity to fear, to doubt and to question the Lord's **page 285** providences. Apparently it was not until the night of the thirteenth day of the storm that the Lord sent an angel to St. Paul with the consoling message, "Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar; and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with

thee." (Verse 24.) We may safely assume that during those days of testing the Apostle remained heartily loyal in faith toward God, and that this Message at the close was in the nature of an encouragement and an expression of approval.

We may draw a good lesson from this incident, not only in respect to our own affairs in life, but in a general way to all spiritual testings and trials. The Lord may lead in mysterious ways regarding our temporal matters and our service for Him and His Cause. While He gives us assurances of His love and care and of the ultimate outcome of the narrow way to all who faithfully follow in the footsteps of Jesus, nevertheless He may meantime permit trials and difficulties of various kinds to come as storms upon us, threatening our very destruction, threatening the overwhelming of our spiritual life, darkening the sky of our hopes with the thunder-clouds of our enemies' threats and with Satan's roarings. Our duty is to let the eye of faith be undimmed by these various terrible conditions – to let our hearts be firmly fixed upon Him who has promised and who will perform.

THOUGHTS BY THE WAY

The expression, "God hath given thee all them that sail with thee," is very meaningful. There is no suggestion in these words of "the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men," as that false teaching is now advocated by many who are actuated by a noble impulse. On the contrary, the thought is that there was only one man on board that ship who was in personal relationship to God. The others, whatever their natural traits of character, had never come into relationship with God.

There is another thought which may be inferred from the angel's words: The Divine care going with the saints may prove to be a great blessing to their companions, even though, as in this case, these be worldly and unregenerate. This thought is particularly applicable in the earthly families of the people of God. The

consecrated parent is the direct object of Divine care; for of the angels it is written, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14.) And in the angelic ministrations to these, very frequently – indeed, we may suppose very generally – those of their families who have not come into full relationship with the Lord are to some extent included under the protecting care.

Elsewhere the Apostle points out that in some respects the believing wife has a blessed influence over her husband, or the believing husband a favorable influence over the wife, in regard to their children; else the children would be accounted unholy. (1 Corinthians 7:14.) This is another illustration of the same general lesson that Divine care, although especially for the saints, includes all of their interests of every kind. This does not necessarily imply earthly prosperity, wealth, preservation from accident, shipwreck, etc., as in St. Paul's case; and yet it always means an advantage in some sense and in some degree. Let us take from this thought all the comfort that we can. All things shall work together for good to the Lord's saints (Romans 8:28); and those who are nearest and dearest to them will surely be participants to some extent in their interest and in the Divine care.

ST. PAUL'S MESSAGE OF CHEER

Promptly after having received the assurances of the safety of all on board, the Apostle made the matter known to the ship's company. Then he manifested his own faith in the message by cheerfulness and by breaking his fast, and by advising all the others to do likewise. His spirit was contagious. All were cheered; and doubtless all were impressed not only by the fact to which the Apostle called their attention – that this disaster had resulted from their failure to follow his advice – but also by the evidence of God's special favor toward him respecting the knowledge of their ultimate rescue.

So should it be with the Lord's people. Whatever we know that is good or comforting or refreshing to ourselves we should dispense to others. Had the Apostle kept the good news to himself, it would have implied either that he did not have faith in its fulfilment, or that he was selfish. But having the Lord's spirit of generosity, as well as large trust in the Lord, he did not hesitate to make known the coming deliverance; and he glorified God in that he did not claim to have this knowledge of himself, but credited it to a revelation.

Evidently the prisoner had produced a deep impression upon many of the soldiers and the sailors. Who can say that at some future time the Apostle's brave, noble conduct may have influenced some of his two hundred and seventy-six companions – possibly eventually drawing some of them to the Lord? So it should be with each of us. We should be prompt to tell to others the best tidings we have. Sympathy with the groaning creation in the various trials of life should lead us to point to the Lord's promises respecting the coming Kingdom of Messiah and the blessings which shall then come to all the families of the earth. Whoever does not thus proclaim daily, on every suitable opportunity, gives evidence either of lack of knowledge or faith in the revelation or else of selfishness, which the Lord cannot approve and which, if persisted in, will ultimately debar him from a share in the Kingdom.

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