

SHIPWRECKED ON MELITA – (MALTA)

– *NOVEMBER 5. – ACTS 27:38-44. –*

ST. PAUL A MAN AMONGST MEN – HIS EXAMPLE EVER WORTHY OF EMULATION – HIS TRANSFORMATION OF CHARACTER A WITNESS TO THE POWER OF GOD – HIS COURAGE DURING THE HURRICANE – HIS THWARTING THE SAILORS' PLAN TO ABANDON THE VESSEL – HIS INFLUENCE WITH THE CENTURION – HIS EXPERIENCES ON THE ISLAND.

"Jehovah redeemeth the soul of His servants; and none of them that take refuge in Him shall be condemned." – Psalm 34:22. R.V.

OUR STUDIES for the current year show us St. Paul from various standpoints – a bigoted persecutor; a humble penitent crying, "Lord, what wouldst Thou have me do?"; a courageous witness to the Truth amongst his own people; a self-sacrificing missionary in foreign lands. We have noted his conduct in the presence of kings and nobles. We have admired his courage in the presence of danger while on his voyage to Rome as a prisoner. Today we view him as a man amongst men in contact with the duties of life and in the midst of a great disaster – a shipwreck.

From the time when he became a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, St. Paul's deportment was noble, humble, reverential, faithful, devout, saintly, worthy of emulation by all the followers of the Master. The transformation wrought in St. Paul is possible in all who have the hearing ear and who receive the Gospel Message into good and honest hearts. Of itself such a transformation is a witness to the power of God – to the reality of the religion of the Bible. What a changed world we should be in if all mankind underwent such a transformation!

But not all are in the condition of heart to be thus influenced, thus drawn by the Gospel. Some will need the strong arm of Messiah – will need the authority and the force of the Millennial Kingdom – to bring them into subjection and to show them the advantages of right over wrong. Thank God that with faith we may pray, "Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in Heaven"! expecting the realization soon.

ENCOURAGING HIS COMPANIONS

Scudding before the storm of fourteen days and nights, the vessel finally reached a place where the trained ears of the seamen in the night caught the sound of the surf, they knew not where. Then they cast four anchors out of the stern of the vessel, and waited for the morning.

By this time St. Paul, the Jewish prisoner, had risen in the estimation of all on board the ship; for God was with him. Throughout the storm all but the Apostle had lost both courage and hope; and his cheerful attitude was due to his submission to God's will and partly to the fact that in a vision the Lord had showed him that he should yet preach the Gospel at Rome, and that for his sake Divine Providence would care for every life on board the ship. A heart at peace with God and instructed through His Word is prepared for whatever may come of joy or sorrow.

The Apostle exhorted his companions to be of good cheer. He reminded them of his vision, and assured them of his absolute faith therein. Then he urged them to take food in order that they might be strengthened for the strenuous exertions of the coming day. His cheerfulness and his example were contagious. As the **light [R5966 : page 297]** of the Lord was his peace and joy, so he in turn was the light of the ship and the comfort of those thereon. He illustrated what he taught – that God's people should do good unto all men as they have opportunity, especially to the Household of Faith. He exemplified his own words to the Corinthian Church: "God

comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them that are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." – Galatians 6:10; 2 Cor. 1:4.

ESCAPING FROM THE WRECK

With the morning light they discerned the shore and a little bay which is now known as St. Paul's Bay in the Island of Malta, then called Melita. The sailors cut loose from the anchors, hoisted sail and sought to beach the boat. But before reaching shore, the vessel grounded on a mudbank; and the forepart holding fast, the rear began to go to pieces with the force of the waves; for it was a meeting place for two sea currents. In the night the life boat had been cut adrift, because the sailors had attempted to desert the ship. St. Paul had advised this course. Having discerned the evident intention of the sailors to escape in the small boat, he communicated the facts to the centurion, and pointed out the necessity of compliance with reasonable precautions to insure the fulfilment of the Divine promise.

So we all should understand that we have something to do in realizing the gracious promises of God to us. In connection with the affairs of this life He has promised that our bread and our water shall be sure. But this does not imply that we shall neglect reasonable opportunities for securing these. He has promised us a share in the coming Messianic Kingdom. But it is for us to make our calling and election sure. God is thoroughly capable and willing to perform all of His part in connection with every matter; but it is to our advantage that He calls upon us to show our faith by our works – by our cooperation with Him in various ways.

Seeing that only by swimming or by floating on wreckage could the shore be reached, the soldiers proposed that the prisoners be killed; for under Roman law they were answerable with their lives for the security of those committed to their charge. But the centurion had learned to esteem the Apostle, and for his sake spared all the

prisoners, doubtless remembering the vision which had inspired them all with the hope and the courage which had brought them this far toward safety. It turned out as St. Paul had foretold – that every human life was spared, but that the ship alone was lost with her cargo.

THE APOSTLE FROM A NEW VIEWPOINT

On the shore we get a new picture of St. Paul. He neither stood on any dignity nor assumed superiority to be served. On the contrary, he promptly assisted in serving the interests of the entire company. We find him gathering sticks for a fire, at which the company might be warmed and dried. The barbarians of the island – so-called because they spoke neither Greek nor Latin, but Phoenician – showed them various kindnesses.

But when the natives saw a viper, warmed to life by the heat of the fire, fasten itself upon the Apostle's hand, they reasoned that this prisoner was doubtless a murderer who, having escaped the perils of shipwreck, was still pursued by Divine Justice and bitten in order that he might die. They supposed that St. Paul's arm would swell with the poison from the viper, and that soon the prisoner would be writhing in agony and die in torture. But when he shook off the serpent and suffered no injury, they concluded that he must be a god.

Here a fresh opportunity was afforded for the honoring of the Gospel Message; for St. Paul soon afterwards found that the father of the governor was sick, and he miraculously healed the man and other sick people of the island. Thus was the knowledge of Christ and His minister spread abroad to a considerable extent, although as far as we have any information the Apostle did not attempt to preach the Gospel Message, either to his companions on shipboard or to the people of the island. Evidently he did not consider them to be "good ground" in which to sow the seed of the Kingdom – did not consider them to be of those whom the Lord our God has called to be of the Bride class now being selected and tested. Doubtless their

experiences will prove profitable to them in the due time when the glorified Christ shall draw all men unto Himself (John 12:32), granting them blessed opportunities for knowledge, for blessing and for Restitution. – Acts 3:19-23.

We notice that the Apostle was not bent upon exciting men's minds, but was practising the same Gospel methods which the Master had taught him; namely, of counting the cost of discipleship, and then, if willing to pay the price, of taking up the cross and following the Lord. If this, the Master's method for gathering His people from the world (Matthew 16:24; Luke 14:27-33), were still pursued, there would be many fewer nominal Christians; but we believe that there would be no smaller number of the genuine ones.

The time for bringing the world in is not yet come. Hence the Master prayed not for the world, but for those whom the Father had given Him out of the world. His words were: "I pray not for the world, but for them whom Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine. ...Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also that shall believe on Me through their word; that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me." (John 17:9,20,21.) The gathering of the Elect is under disadvantageous conditions, which will thoroughly test them, making their way so narrow that few will find it, and still fewer progress in it. But when God's due time for dealing with the world shall come, the powers of Heaven and earth will cooperate with the glorified Church in making the Gospel so plain that a wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein. – Isaiah 35:8-10.

As far as the record shows, the Apostle and his companions did no mission work amongst the barbarians of the island on which they were wrecked, nor amongst the soldiers and the sailors who were their companions during that winter. They left no Church there. Therefore we may safely presume that they found no hearing ears.

The lesson to us from this fact should be that we are not to expect the conversion of the world nor anything akin to it. But we are to expect that the Lord will find with the Truth a sufficient number to complete the elect Church, and then, with the power and authority of the Kingdom, will establish righteousness and cause the knowledge of Himself to fill the earth and to bless the whole world, through The Christ. – Galatians 3:8,16,29.

"When the storms of life are raging,
Tempests wild on sea and land,
I will seek a place of refuge
In the shadow of God's hand.

"So, when here the cross I'm bearing,
Meeting storms and billows wild,
Jesus for my soul is caring:
Naught can harm His Father's child."

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