

CRUCIFIED TO LIVE

“I am crucified . . . nevertheless I live”

by

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CHAPTER TWELVE

PAUL'S PERILOUS EUROCLYDON

“The south wind blew softly . . . But not long after there arose a tempestuous wind called Euroclydon” (Acts 27:13, 14)

Paul was, in many respects, a law unto himself. On more than one occasion the legalists were sent into a huddle to determine the best disposition of his case. Not infrequently, after serious consultation, decisions had to be reversed when the great Apostle before the bar of justice would frustrate them by using another language, claiming dual-citizenship or citing some obsolescent law. King Agrippa had such an experience. He called Festus, the governor of Judea, into counsel; and, after weighing the evidence, they reached the conclusion that “**this man might have been set at liberty if he had not appealed unto Caesar.**” Now, he must be sent to Rome.

The sailing date was not arbitrarily fixed. It was a matter of booking passage whenever a ship sailed toward Italy. In due course Paul was placed on board a small vessel with two hundred, seventy-five other passengers, mostly prisoners of the state. That was to become a most eventful voyage. The whole Mediterranean was convulsed with incredible turbulence. The fathomless deep writhed with increasing restlessness. The wind with unabated violence plowed deep furrows in the watery field, heaping mountainous waves in an unstable poise, only to lash one against another in spasms of fury. Sun and stars alike were eclipsed in the raging storm as the fierce gale spent its force.

In the midst of the tempest, tossed and torn, was their little craft in dire distress. It put to sea under balmy skies, with the south wind blowing but softly and with its confident crew hopeful of reaching a winter haven at Phenice. The progress was gratifying until—until the foe of all mariners began displaying the portents of disaster. With immeasurable volume and incalculable velocity, it rushed over the horizon with insidious and inscrutable maneuvers like a powerful military thrust against a helpless garrison in an open field.

Scripturally stated, “**the ship was caught**” (caught by furious forces. Its control was utterly wrested from the hands of naval experience and driven off its course and under the lee of a little island called Clauda. Desperately, the terrified sailors struggled to cast anchor and to lighten the cargo lest they plunge onto the Syrtis (quicksands).

Their lives were in constant jeopardy as the gale harassed them with undiminished violence through three sunless days and starless nights. When the last ray of hope was vanishing, Paul signaled for attention. His calm demeanor contrasted with the fearful, fainting hearts of the crew. Above the roar of raging waters, his voice was heard in an immortal declaration: “**Sirs, take courage for I believe God.**”

The tempest was without precedent. For a full fortnight it raged, with each succeeding day lowering the morale of the sailors and depleting the resourcefulness of the official personnel. But, then, life would not be so adventuresome nor faith so necessary if trials did not present some new problem. The undiminishing wind velocity, the twisting, swirling waves, the quicksands, the rocks—all these baffling factors were calling for the wisest nautical maneuvers, but human ingenuity was obviously insufficient. The dense darkness, settling for many successive nights and days, had a marked demoralizing effect upon those on board and provoked many irrational acts. All hope of survival had disappeared. It was, in truth, a definite time of man’s extremity. Eternity alone will reveal the value of a praying saint who brought triumph in the tempest.

Paul Volunteers Counsel.

Three times the Apostle called for an audience. Each time he prefaced his statement with the salutation “**Sirs.**” This was not sheer courtesy. It was directness and definiteness more than it was politeness. “**Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage**” (v. 10). This was perception. It was late in the sailing season, about the middle of October, beyond the time of the Feast of Trumpets, and much concern was evidenced about the advisability of continuing the voyage. The ship dropped anchor for a time of consultation at a place called the Fair Havens. It was here that Paul enunciated his concern. The warning, however, was ignored as the commanding officer ordered the journey resumed.

Carried, as he was, by force of circumstance, into the dangers that lay before, Paul had but one recourse. That was a precious and an assuring one. He knew well that his life had been hidden in God by Christ Jesus from the indescribable tempest of sin and its consequences. What was any storm in comparison? Perhaps Peter had related to him during their fortnight visit in Jerusalem, some four years previously, how Jesus bade him to walk on the water in the midst of the storm. Surely Paul was cognizant of the intervention of the Master when once He stilled the waves and quieted the disciples’ hearts (Mk. 4:39). Thus, there was a peace-sustaining calmness in his soul. All was well between him and the Lord. He would not fear the storm nor faint before its terrifying portents.

Of all the faith-impairing stratagems which Satan employs, perhaps none is so destructive as to be held where personal wishes are ignored, scruples belittled and finer principles mocked. It is then that faith must have a strength to remain firm. To reason that the force of circumstances may preclude all possibility of an unswerving steadfastness is false logic. The testimony of the martyrs refutes it. Faith has an enduring quality which, when firmly exercised, sues for victory even when hope has faded utterly. He who counseled others to “**withstand in the evil day and having done all, to stand,**” is, himself, a towering example of such teaching.

He was the one and only passenger on that voyage who had unquestionable composure. His faith was unimpaired.

Paul was a veteran of many a trial. He could even look a storm in the face and declare, "None of these things move me." This was steadfastness, the kind about which David sang in Psalm eleven. "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" Israel's sweet singer inquired. To him it seemed that the foundations of law and justice, of love and loyalty, of virtue and honour, of courtesy and decency had utterly collapsed. He was urged to "flee as a bird" which meant he could run as a renegade to evil, depart as a weakling to worldliness or turn as a traitor to compromise. Would he do this? No, not if God is Who He is and where He is. not if a servant can still repose confidence in the Almighty. David avowed with firmness, "In the Lord put I my trust." Paul was of the same mind. He rested on a foundation which no man could lay and all hell could not destroy (I Corinthians 3:11). The passengers were sanctified by his presence.

Paul ventures an exhortation.

"Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me and not have loosed from Crete . . . now I exhort you to be of good cheer; for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship" (vs. 21, 22).

This exhortation came at a time when the sun had been eclipsed for many days and the stars obscured for as many nights, at a time when hopelessness had been conceded by all. Even then, it was only after lengthy fasting, which is suggested by the words "**after long abstinence**" (v. 21).

This time was spent in prevailing prayer. His petitioning voice may not have been audible above the roaring waves, but it is safe to assume that he was storming heaven's door, not for his personal safety but for the passengers' salvation. Whether his own decease were by submerging or by impalement was of little consequence. One way or the other, he would be with his blessed Lord. His chief concern was for the lost which often reached the proportions of heart-travail and soul-agony. We can almost visualize him in the hold importuning God when not on the deck imploring men. Paul had a faith which left little or no room for fear.

In the darkest hour, the most likely time for a heavenly visitant, the Angel of God stood by him.

This is the dramatic manner in which divine reinforcements were rushed to a staunch, stalwart soldier of the cross who was waging a battle against great odds. It was the One whom Paul served, the One to whom he belonged; it was the Lord Himself. He stands by His own. Under no circumstance will He leave them in the lurch.

"Truth forever on the scaffold,
Wrong forever on the throne;
Yet the scaffold sways the future,
But behind the dim unknown
Standeth God within the shadows,
Keeping watch above His own."

Let the tempest tear at the stern, the arm of the Lord was beneath the bow as long as His servant was part of the cargo.

The ship could not and would not disintegrate until a “**chosen vessel**” had disembarked. With such substantial encouragement, a prisoner could well preach to the perplexed people on board. He exhorted them first of all to be of good cheer, to let their fears subside; for, while the ship would inevitably founder, the passengers would unquestionably reach land. Paul’s fearlessness in the midst of such appalling conditions was supported by his self-abandonment to the care of an able Deliverer, and this fact made him the indomitable personality of which the Church could well wish for many.

The message of the Lord to His servant was of a threefold character.

First, it had to do with *much needed comfort*. “**Fear not, Paul.**” We must not forget that Paul was a human being. His old nature was not eradicated. Satan still had sufficient in him to gain a beachhead. Paul well knew this fact, for did not he once say, “**He that thinketh he standeth, let him take heed lest he fall?**” This protracted storm could well have worn down so rugged an individual as he, even as the constant lashing threatened to crush the vessel. But the supply lines are never too difficult for the Captain of the Lord’s hosts. He simply dispatched His angel, who with lightning speed was there with what His servant required most. It was divine assurance; it was heavenly comfort. It was a tonic *par excellence* to the tired and troubled disciples when their Lord greeted them with a “**Fear not.**” It was a stimulant, too, to Isaiah of old, when weary and worn, to have the Lord God say, “**It is I, even I, that comforteth thee.**”

The message of God to Paul was also *something of a confirmed commission*.

“**Thou must be brought before Caesar.**” The word **must** carries with it the very essence of compulsion. Our Lord had the lash above His head. “**He must needs go through Samaria.**” Every human being who knows anything about responsibility is conscious of the lash of musts in his life. This is particularly true of servants. Here, it became evident that the Lord meant for Paul to go to Rome. It must have been by permission and prompting of the Holy Spirit that he first appealed his case to Caesar.

It was by divine protection that the journey was completed during such unprecedented conditions. It was by divine power, released through a commissioned ambassador, that Roman Jews were to receive the gospel. So to Rome he came.

Further, this heavenly announcement *contained a promise of conversions*.

“**Lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.**”

In what sense were they given to Paul? It can hardly be doubted that there was a work of grace on the ship. Those men knew that all secular supports were removed and that they must fall back either upon God or upon nothing.

How fortunate for them that there was on board one who knew of a surety that God is a very present help in trouble! How wonderful that the divine commission put the right man in the right place at the right time, a man who had come face to face with the Saviour and who knew how to introduce others to Him! These are the doings of the Lord and they are wonderful in our eyes. They gave up the ship but they gained the Saviour.

Paul voices his faith.

It is not difficult to imagine something of the language of desperation from unregenerate hearts during those tumultuous days of sustained suspense. The restless prisoners with the usual bitter attitude toward the state for their apprehension, and the disgust because of their own stupidity in failing to evade the law, the resentfulness of ship hands at the harsh statements of superiors because of incompetence due to demoralizing fears, the unsuppressed oaths of officers at the slightest provocation, all gave the atmosphere a sacrilegious cast. It was at such a time as this that Paul dared to reaffirm his faith in God and to make vocal the only hope of all men. Although his speech was said to be contemptible by some hypercritical Corinthians, it must have rung out with triumphant clarity to sober the minds of the unhappy and unstable voyagers—**“Sirs, I believe God.”**

This personal profession of faith was magnified by a prospect which inspired Paul noticeably. **“It shall be!”** he insisted. All that the passengers could see were the terrors of the deep, the horrors of death and the blackness of the future.

There is no prospect whatever for one whose eyes are unenlightened by the Word, whose heart is unaffected by divine grace and whose feet are unled by the Holy Spirit. With Paul it was different. **“It shall be!”** he urged. He meant that all would be well. He insisted that all would reach shore in safety.

All of this assurance was based on promise—the promise of the Angel of God. **“It shall be even as it was told me,”** he added. Let us never think otherwise. What God has promised will never fail of fulfillment.

- It shall transpire even as He said. **“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house.”**
- It shall be even as it was told. **“This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.”**
- It shall be even as it was told. **“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away.”**
- It shall be even as it is told. **“And the nations snail be turned into hell together with them that forget God.”**
- It shall be even as it was told.

Not a man on board that Rome-bound ship doubted for a moment the intense seriousness of the Apostle; all felt the impact of his convincing statement.

Well did Paul know that he was a marked man. The circumstances which made the other living beings prisoners of the state varied in seriousness of legal infractions, but all knew about Paul—the deserter of his Jewish faith, a self-established religious leader, a noted fanatic, a perverter of sacred matters. Yet, one who exercised himself **“to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men”** could not be forced into despondency under any trying experience.

What was more, in relating the heavenly announcement, he proudly identified himself as a child of God and a servant of the Most High, by adding, **“Whose I am and whom I serve.”** Men on an isolated raft, entombed in a blasted mine or on a sinking ship usually become responsive to the Word of God. Paul’s exhortation had registered.

During those fearful fourteen days of breath-taking naval experiences, the men on board mustered what religious fervor they could and instituted a fast. Paul, remembering the message of the Angel that the ship should be lost, knew something of the struggle each would have for his life. Such an effort would demand the utmost strength, and strength is gained by nourishment; thus, he besought them to take meat, explaining that **“this is for your health.”** Joining them in a meal amid the tempest, **“he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all.”** He was neither ashamed of the gospel of Christ nor of the Christ of the gospel.

Life is in truth *mare nostrum*. The skies are no longer balmy; the clouds are thickly gathering. The sailing is difficult for the hour is dark, and the wind of confusion and perplexity is increasing in velocity. The voices of the storm are loud and distress calls fill the atmosphere, already surcharged with apprehension, fear and anxiety. Many little crafts are thrust upon the shoals, while untold numbers are carried by contrary winds, with sails torn, rudders gone, and disaster looming with terrifying prominence. All the while the lighthouse signals are more and more misleading with the lower lights faint and flickering. This is a nautical view of life.

Alas! Jonah was asleep in his storm; Paul was alert. What should be our condition? If in Paul’s Euroclydon the fellow sailors needed courage, not human but divine, of what stupendous proportions is the need in this present Levanter of ours with its world-wide threatening?

Shall we hesitate to stand amid the turmoil of atheism and spiritual cowardice and affirm with undiminishing emphasis, **“Sirs, we believe God?”**

Paul saw the futility of human effort without divine assistance. Equally true is this same fact today. Every servant of the Lord should make vocal his faith in the God who is sufficient, in any storm, for those who repose their trust in Him, **“Sirs, we believe God!”** We see the **“works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep; for He commandeth and raiseth the stormy wind which lifteth up the waves thereof.”**

Any end that brings one to the Lord is a good end, and a cry of despair is a concomitant to dependence. Blessed is the man, even amid the convulsions of the deep, who knows there is a Light that never flickers, a Lifeline that never weakens, a distress Receiver Who never slumbers or sleeps. **“Sirs, we believe God!”**

Every sailor has a desired haven. He has glad hopes and happy expectations, but his anticipation may suffer through the treachery of the storm. Dangers lurk along his course. "Today we're happy and in the sunlight's glow; tomorrow we may be limp in' and trudging through the snow." But, we believe God!

"He maketh the storm a calm so that the waves thereof are still . . . Oh, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men!"

Yes, Paul sailed head-on into an Euroclydon, and every one of us, sometime, somewhere, may be tossed about in a fearful Levanter. Hope will seem to fade, joy will vanish, the soul will melt, indecision will tower insurmountably; but, away with fear-be stilled thou failing heart! Believe thou in God, and triumph amid the tempest.

~ end of chapter 12 ~

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