

"OTHER LITTLE SHIPS"

"And there were also with him other little ships" (Mark 4:36).

In the early part of this century a ship was built in England, which was supposed to be perfect in every respect. It was a wonderful structure, the very acme of the shipbuilding technique. It was believed to be unsinkable. Named for the strongest heathen god, it was called "Titanic." It was said that it could defy storms and even wreckage for, if one compartment should be destroyed, the others would remain intact. Human arrogance reaches its height when it defies God. The "Titanic" started out on its maiden voyage with hundreds of passengers on board. At mid-ocean it collided with an iceberg, only slightly noticeable, but one side of the ship was ripped open and in only two and one-half hours it sank and sixteen hundred passengers found their grave in the ocean.

The only unsinkable ship was the one on which the Lord Jesus was the captain.

Christ had been teaching the people from His seat in the boat on the beautiful Sea of Galilee. When He had finished, He was weary and craved a period of rest. So, He commanded His disciples to take Him across the Sea of Galilee, which was eighteen miles long and twelve miles wide. The disciples took Him and started across the beautiful body of water. It was a quiet night. Not a ripply disturbed the face of the sea. Calm night, starry night, and beautiful night, the sailors ran up all the sails, plied the oars, and let the large and the small boats glide over the gentle waters. Soon after the Saviour was prostrate and His head touched the pillow, which was likely the coat of a fisherman, He was sound asleep. Under ordinary circumstances, a sail of an hour and a half would have seen them across. But this time it was not to be a swift and smooth passage. One of those furious squalls suddenly struck.

The disciples did their best to keep their boat afloat. In spite of their strenuous efforts, the storm was getting the better of the expert sailors, for "the boat was now filling." The furious waves dashed into their raft and a watery grave seemed to stare them in the face, all of the time that they were fighting for bare life. Christ Jesus was asleep in the stern. They awakened Him, and you can catch in their words the accents of reproach as they revealed the fact that they thought they had been neglected in their hour of need. They cried, "Master, carest thou not that we perish?"

That great personage lifted His head from the pillow of the fisherman's coat, walked to the front of the boat, and looked out into the storm. Around Him were the smaller boats, driven in the tempest, and through it came the cries of what seemed to be drowning men. Looking upward Christ cried, "Peace!" and looking downward He said, "Be still." The waves fell flat on their faces, the foam melted, and the extinguished stars relighted their torches. The tempest fell dead, and Christ stood with His foot on the neck of the storm. While the sailors were bailing out the water from the boats, and trying to untangle the cordage, the disciples stood in amazement, now looking at the calm sea, then into the beautiful sky, and then into the calm countenance of the Saviour, and cried out, "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?"

This incident impresses me of the tremendous importance of having Christ in the ship. All of those boats would have gone to the bottom of the Sea of Galilee if Christ had

not been present. Oh, what a lesson for you and me to learn! We must always have Christ in the ship. Whatever voyage we undertake, or into whatever enterprise we start, let us always have Christ in the ship. No harm can befall people when Christ is with them, for He is never heedless.

When those winds swept down, and the waters of the sea were tossed into wrath, they found that following Christ was not smooth sailing. If you follow Christ, you need not expect smooth sailing through life. But, do not be disheartened, for the Lord will see you through the trials of life if you remain with Him.

When Christ spoke the word of peace and calmed that storm, the calm not only brought safety to His immediate followers, but also to the others in the little ships. In other words, what Christ did directly for one, He did indirectly for others. These "other little ships" had passengers on board who were the recipients that night of unseen and unrecognized blessings.

In reading this story of the miraculous stilling of the tempest, it is natural that our attention should be drawn chiefly to the ship in which Christ sailed. Although the disciples who sailed in the ship with the Lord Jesus enjoyed the special advantages of His presence, and the privilege of calling upon Him in their time of danger, yet on that stormy night, sailing that troubled sea, there were "also with him other little ships."

There are always many ships at sea, and the storm that breaks on one of the ships breaks upon the others. The "other little ships" remind us of the comradeships of life. Although you may not know it, there are other souls fighting the same kind of battle, and in their courage and endurance you should find an inspiration.

The storm that breaks upon one ship breaks upon others. This is true of those who are exposed to the winds of adversity. However troubled you may be by circumstances which you imagine are peculiar to you, out on the storm-swept sea there are also "other little ships." The storm of adversity does not break upon you alone. There are some who imagine that their situation is peculiarly difficult.

I would remind you that you are not alone in your adversity. There are "other little ships," so you should not groan and grumble too much. You do not have any monopoly on present-day difficulties. There are still "other little ships" on the troubled surface. You need to recognize that nothing strange has happened to you. Trouble is the common lot of life, so don't let it make you hard and bitter. You do not have any monopoly on the tempest -- with you are many "other little ships."

This is true on the sea of physical affliction. Many times a pastor is asked, "Why should I be afflicted so? What have I done to deserve such chastisement? Why should all this trouble come upon me?" Your difficulty is that you are so seasick you cannot get on deck to see the other little ships. When affliction comes to us we are disposed to think that we are the only ones who have such trouble; and yet if we go up on deck a while and look out upon the rolling billows, we shall discover that there are other ships at sea. You are not the only one who has sickness in the home. You are not the only one who bears burdens. Many ships are making their way through the storm in which you find yourself.

Some people are like Dickens' Mrs. Gummidge who used to suffer from the east wind,

who when informed that the east wind touched other people as well, insisted that nobody felt it as she felt it; that the east wind went through her shawl as it got through nobody else's shawl. Her constant complaint was, "I'm a lone lorn creetur' myself, and everything that reminds me of creeturs that ain't lone and lorn, goes contrary with me." To "Dan'l" she insisted, "If I felt less, I could do more. You don't feel like me, Dan'l; things don't go contrary with you, nor you with them."

There are many who are like her, who are never so happy as when they are miserable. They take a delight in magnifying all their ills, and in persuading themselves that all the trouble in the world is therein. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Remember, when the storm breaks and the waves are rolling high, yours is not the only ship at sea. With you are "other little ships", equally exposed to the violence of the waves.

"O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted," hear this word from the Lord: "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace, be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." It may comfort you somewhat to know that there are others battling their way through the storm, plowing the waves; and yet receiving grace, like Paul on the sea whipped into fury by the wind called Euroclydon to call upon their fellow-passengers to "be of good cheer." It is good when one gets to the deck of his ship, and looks through the mist of the storm and sees "other little ships," and is comforted by their unconscious fellowship.

These other little ships remind us of the unseen comradeships of life. We are not alone in the storms of life. With you, though you may not know it, there are other souls fighting the same kind of battle through temptation and sorrow, and from them you can find inspiration and encouragement. You may be tempted to think that you have a heavier burden of sorrow than anybody else, and that you are going to be overwhelmed.

Neither you nor I are alone in our suffering and grief. Out there on the ocean of life others are going through the same experience, bearing the same burdens, facing the same kind of losses, passing through the same kind of sorrows. If we could but remember their unseen presence among us, and their display of courage and patience, we would take fresh heart. We adore the sinlessness of Christ, and we bow before His wisdom, but our hearts cling the closer toward Him because of His sympathy.

The first time that a spade turns the sod to dig a grave for one of your loved ones, you can scarcely see through your tears that the path to the cemetery is worn by many feet. Others have been there before you, and as you come away you meet others coming to the same place to bury their hearts. Battling with the boisterous billows of the sea of sorrow there are also "other little ships." This is a troubled world. Long ago a keen observer said, "Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward." You may say it is poor comfort to be reminded that other people are passing through the same experience. But it does help, sometimes.

A mother was standing dumb with grief beside a little coffin in which her only child lay cold in death. Her friends came in, and they brought flowers and placed them around the casket in a well-meant effort to disguise death. But it was still death! A mother stood with her pastor at the casket of her little boy. She laid her hand over on the cold hand of her son and said, "Pastor, that is death." Friends came and told her that she should not weep, that after all God had taken her precious

boy to heaven, and that she must be resigned. She listened to it all, but did not make any response, and remained uncomforted. Then a little woman came in, stood by her side in silence, and then put her arm gently and lovingly around the stricken mother, whom she knew and loved, and said, "Mary, in a drawer at home I have two pairs of little shoes, and the little feet that used to wear them are walking the golden streets today." That was all that she said. But the stricken mother seemed to shade her eyes with her hand as she looked out over the raging waters, until she saw that there were other little ships at sea. There was a bond of sympathy between her and another suffering soul, and she was comforted.

When that brave soul, Charles Kingsley, lay dying in one room, and his wife, dangerously ill in another room, was not expected to recover, she sent him a message and asked if he thought it cowardly for a poor soul to tremble before the great mystery of the unknown world. He replied, "Not cowardly, but remember it is not darkness that we are going to, for God is light; not loneliness, for Christ is with us." In that last experience we are like those "other little ships" all of which made port at last because of the One Who was with them, and before whose presence even the shadows of death melt into radiant light.

There is a reason for you being in the storm. There are "other little ships", and it is your privilege to share with them. These little ships sailed in the wake of the ship in which Christ Jesus sailed. He was not in their ship, but they put to sea because He put to sea. They were there because He was there.

There are special advantages to those who sail in the ship with Jesus. I would rather sail in the ship with Him than to be in any of the other ships, wouldn't you? What was the difference? Those who sailed in the ship with Jesus were conscious of His presence as the others were not. The others shared the miracle, the others reaped the benefit of His stilling the tempest although perhaps they never knew, and never acknowledged, what they owed to Him. Multitudes of people sail a calmer sea, and live an easier life, because Jesus Christ shares the sea with them; they are in one of the "other little ships," and they do not know how much they owe Him. But those who were in the ship with Him knew that it was the presence of Christ in the storm which brought deliverance to them, and to the other ships.

There is a voyage which only one ship can take. When the storm breaks upon that sea, there will be only one ship that can survive. There will not be any other ships with it.

We cannot be delivered from the guilt and power of sin, and brought to everlasting felicity in the presence of God, by the indirect influences of the gospel. Beneficial as such influences may be in this present life, it is only as we are found in the ship with Christ Himself can we safely make that last voyage where there is reared "a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Christ in you is the only hope of glory. Only as you are in Him, and He is in you, can you be brought to the desired haven.

Let us make the words of this hymn our earnest prayer:

"Jesus, Saviour, pilot me
Over life's tempestuous sea;
Unknown waves before me roll,
Hiding rock and treacherous shoal;
Chart and compass come from Thee:
Jesus, Saviour, pilot me.

"As a mother stills her child,
Thou canst hush the ocean wild;
Boisterous waves obey Thy will
When Thou sayest to them, "Be still!"
Wondrous Sovereign of the sea,
Jesus, Saviour, pilot me.

"When at last I near the shore
And the fearful breakers roar
'Twixt me and the peaceful rest,
Then, while leaning on Thy breast,
May I hear Thee say to me,
"Fear not, I will pilot thee."

---Edward Hopper