

ANCHORS FOR THE STORMS

"Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day." Acts 27:29.

Paul had long desired to go to Rome because it was the strategic center of the world. All roads led to Rome, and all roads led away from Rome. He knew that if he could get to Rome, he could tell the whole world about his great Saviour and his Saviour's wonderful way of life.

On trial for his life at Caesarea, Paul appealed to Caesar. As a Roman citizen he had a right to make that appeal, and to Caesar, therefore, he was sent. In custody of Captain Julius, a centurion, along with other prisoners, he was on his way to Rome, Luke's report of the hazardous voyage to Rome and of Paul's masterly movements and utterances on the ship during an awful storm of two weeks' duration is one of the most graphic stories in literature. In this account he has given us the pic of marine literature. In all the stories of the sea, it has never been surpassed, if indeed it has even been equaled.

Instead of being privileged to enjoy a pleasant voyage to Rome, it was one that was filled with perils. They "sailed slowly many days" due to the wind. Finally, they reached a place called, "The Fair Havens." On account of Euroclydon, the dreaded storm that swept the sea at that season of the year, Paul admonished them to cast anchor till the danger was over. Since Paul was only a prisoner and not a sailor, they considered his advice ridiculous, and they refused to listen to him. On they sailed, and on came Euroclydon, and things kept getting worse and worse. Day after day, night after night, with no light of the sun by day and no light of the stars by night, the ship plunged and wallowed in the great deep. Two whole weeks were spent on the waters, not knowing what moment they were going to the very bottom of the sea. After their masts and sails were blown away, and they had lost their bearing, they were all in a panic. They were beaten and driven by the storm until hope of safety was gone, and preparation was being made to kill the prisoners, abandon the ship and take their chances on getting to shore. Then Paul came to the rescue. Standing forth in their midst, he said, "Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And 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. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, 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 shall be even as it was told me." Acts 27: 21-25. When hope had faded from everyone else, Paul told them to be calm, because every man would land safely.

This storm beat down upon the ship in which Paul and his companions were sailing because the owner and master of the ship paid no attention to God's man. At the beginning of the voyage neither he nor the mariners would heed Paul's message; but when they were face to face with death, they were both ready and anxious to hear God's man. Likewise, with many of us, when we are safe and well and prosperous we often try to act independently of God and His workers, but when we come face to face with death and eternity, we want the Lord and the Lord's man close by.

The storm which drive their ship for two whole weeks is typical of the storms that sweep over life's sea. Life is indeed like a voyage on the sea of time. The poets have said, and everybody recognizes it. Sometimes it seems as if it were all smiling skies and favoring winds, but soon or late we encounter a storm. We have only to look around us

to find that we live in a world where fierce storms break. We have only to walk the streets to see faces that bear the marks of rough weather and adverse winds. Often we read of those who have been driven upon the rocks of disaster.

When one faces life he is like one setting out on a voyage. He is on the verge of making many wonderful discoveries, and of exploring new territories. He will discover that it is very easy to get into dangerous waters, to meet the tide of temptation, to find that he is out of his course and that he is beginning to drift. No sooner is one storm passed than we encounter another. Storms of temptation threaten to engulf us. Storms of sorrow all but overwhelm us. The storms of trial, affliction, disappointment and doubt hurl themselves against us until the waves and the billows that go over our souls would hopelessly sink us but for Him Who pilots our boat over life's stormy sea. The old Ship of Zion does not go down. Its Pilot never fails. The hand that guides the planets in their courses is at the helm.

There are many things which a sailor holds to be essential when he sets out on a voyage. He must take sufficient provisions, an ample supply of rope and canvas, a sound helm, and an accurate compass; but there is no article of nautical furniture so absolutely indispensable as a stout anchor. So it is on the voyage across the sea of life, the soul needs an anchor.

Have you and I any anchors on board the ship? Are they strong enough for the day of storm? Are they fit for the strain of life and death, joy and terror, and everything that may happen on life's seas? Is your ship equipped with anchors that will stand the strain?

The faith of some people is purely a faith-weather thing. Some have constructed their religion on the assumption that they are going to meet calm seas and favorable breezes all through their voyage. Some have never reckoned on the possibilities of gales and rocks and angry waves. With treacherous currents and raging winds about us, it behooves us to look well to our anchors.

To come back to our scripture story, after two weeks of drifting before the wind in the raging seas, at midnight on the fourteenth night a cry went up from the lookout, "Breakers ahead!" Immediately the captain ordered the leadsman to sound. The first sounding showed twenty fathoms; then another, a few minutes later, showed fifteen fathoms. That let them know they were drifting rapidly on a dangerous lee shore. Putting his trumpet to his lips and lifting his voice above the roar of the gale, the captain shouted, "Stern anchors down!" Immediately, the seamen let four anchors down from the stern, and "wished for the dawn."

Everything depended upon those four anchors. If their cables snapped, the ship would drive on the rocks in the darkness and all would perish. But some nameless iron worker of Damascus had done his work well. Some rope maker had done his work well. When you do an honest piece of work, whether it is preparing a sermon, or weaving a garment, or forging an iron, or making a rope, you never know how many you will serve. So the whole company aboard the ship escaped safely -- saved by means of the four anchors.

1. The Anchor of Faith.

Every time a sailor lets down his anchor into the deep, it is an act of faith. He cannot see the bed of the ocean; it is hidden from his sight, but he knows from his soundings that it is there. The anchor of faith rests on facts. Feelings prove an insecure holding ground, for in the time when doubt assails, a fellow needs solid ground. His faith must be

"Fastened to the Rock which cannot move,
Grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love."

And indeed all other rocks are "sham-rocks." There is a story of an infidel who, while on his death-bed, was urged by his godless companions not to show the white feather, but to hold on. "How can I hold on when there is nothing to hold to?" was his pathetic question. No anchor of faith in God! What a tragedy!

2. The Anchor of the Bible.

The Bible is not a book; but it is the Book. It is the indestructible, ever-living, eternity-enduring Word of God. Some time after Robinson Crusoe had been cast on the lonely island he was taken desperately ill. It is bad enough to be sick at home, where you have members of the family and friends to look after you, or in the hospital, where you have the doctors and the nurses; but it is much worse to be sick all by yourself on a lonely island. With a great effort Robinson managed to open the lid of a chest which he had retrieved from the wreck of the ship. Searching for medicine, and divinely led, as he was afterward sure, he found in the chest not only medicine for the body but medicine for the soul, a Bible. After he had taken the medicine, he opened the Bible, and the first words on which his eyes fell were these from the fiftieth Psalm, "Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify My Name." This greatly impressed him and he began to hope that perhaps God would heal him of his sickness and deliver him from his solitary island and bring him back to his native land and to his friends once more. Before he went to bed that night he did a thing which he had never done before in his life. He knelt down and prayed, and in his prayer he asked God that He would fulfill the promise of that verse in his own life, heal him of his sickness and deliver him from his wave-washed island. When he had so prayed he felt much better, and sank into an untroubled sleep. Some days afterwards he was walking along the shore with his gun over his shoulder, when his heart almost stopped as he saw on the sand the imprint of the foot of a savage. He fled immediately to his stockade, and climbing the wall, pulled the ladder in after him in the greatest fear and terror. Then these words came to his mind again, "Call on Me in the day of trouble and I will deliver thee," and he began to lose his fear.

The Word of God is an anchor of the soul. If you use it, it will keep you from drifting upon dangerous shores, and it will be your friend and helper in every time of danger and distress.

3. The Anchor of the Cross of Christ.

Do you know what it means to feel the grip of that cross upon your soul? I wonder if there is any anchor like love! When the storms are on the deep, is there any safety like the power of a great affection? When the cross of God's uttermost on Calvary has a grip upon a man, when he has felt the strength of the love that will not let him go-- what an anchor that is to the soul! It is stronger than the waves of life, and mightier than the whirlwind of death. The cross binds, grips and holds your soul with grace and mercy. In the love of this be pure. In the grip of this stand steady. In the strength of this come victor.

If Christ is your anchor, you are safe in any storm. You can truly sing:

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand.

4. The Anchor of Prayer.

There are storms of temptation and hurricanes of doubt that will assail the vessel of your life, and the only thing to do is to let down the anchor of prayer, and trust Jesus to pull you through the storm. In his young manhood Joseph used the anchors of faith and prayer when he was tempted to desecrate his body. "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" was his earnest cry. Daniel used the anchor of prayer when tempted to bow down to custom and forsake principle in order to gain popularity. Prayer was the Saviour's anchor in the wilderness, in Gethsemane, and at Calvary. But prayer was His habit long before the crisis came, so that He was always prepared for life's unguarded hours.

Without prayer there is no Christian life possible that is worthy of the name. Why? Because it is down the channel of prayer that the power of God comes into one's life. And you cannot live the life for which Jesus stands, you cannot love your neighbor as you ought, and you cannot keep the spiritual outlook upon the world without the power of God to help you to do it. Stay on good terms with God and keep in touch with Him through prayer.

5. The Anchor of Worship.

If we are going to make a successful voyage, we must steer our boat regularly from the open sea into some quiet haven, and let down the anchor of worship. If we are going to be prepared for the storms when they come, then we must prepare ourselves while the weather is still calm. Sometimes the voyage will be rough, the seas high, and the gales severe; but

With Christ in the vessel
You'll smile at the storm.

There are not many shipwrecks among those who regularly worship in the house of God. One of the old saints used to say that he went to church because it gave him an opportunity to get his head out of time into eternity. What a story it would be if we could tell the life history of all those who have found peace and hope and warning and guidance in the worship of God's House!

6. The Anchor of Duty.

Are there not times when we rebel against duty? We kick against what we think to be the drudgery that cribs and cabins and confines us. Why should we be shackled? Why should we be held down? Why should life not be our own? Why is there not more freedom to do as we like?

There are ships sailing the seas of life today, souls of men and women, that would have been smashed and wrecked and done for scores of times, if they had not had the anchor of duty to steady them and to hold them safe.

Take Josephine Butler, the great nineteenth century heroine and benefactress of broken and outcast womanhood. She had returned home one day from a journey, and Evangeline, her only daughter -- who was the light of her life -- was watching for her coming. When the carriage reached the door, the child in her eagerness ran from the window, leaned over the balustrade, and fell -- and lay dying at her mother's feet. Terrible beyond words was the darkness of that day's grief; but at last Mrs. Butler turned for help and comfort to the home of an old, saintly Quaker woman who lived nearby. And this was the message she received. "God hath taken to Himself her whom thou didst love; but there are many forlorn young hearts who need that mother-love of thine. Go to ___ Street, Number ____, and knock." She went. It turned out to be a refuge where forty young

lives, once lost and in peril, were being cared for with all the kindness of true Christian sympathy and understanding. Into that labor of love Mrs. Butler threw herself; and so found herself committed to the high task that was to make her one of the greatest social reformers of the century. Thus in the day of her bitterest need, when she thought she had reached the end of everything, the end of faith, of love, etc., it was the call of duty that steadied her, and calmed her, and gave her the mastery of her soul. Thank God for duty, that mighty anchor. Thank God for the tasks that give you something better to do than to indulge in brooding and introspection.

"Anchored in Jesus, what matters the gale,
Storm winds may blow, but they cannot prevail;
Safe as a child on the dear Saviour's breast,
Anchored in Jesus, my soul is at rest."