

LIFE'S CONTRARY WINDS

"And he saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them." Mark 6:48.

No devout Bible student can ever forget the memorable moment in his life when he first looked down from one of the surrounding hills upon the glassy waves and silent shores of the beautiful Sea of Galilee. He recalls that along its shores Christ walked frequently in the light of the early morning. The lowly sands along the shore formerly bore the imprint of His feet. Many times He was borne across the sea in the bark of a fisherman. He walked upon the crystal waters of this sea as if they had been solid ground beneath His feet.

On various occasions our Lord was deprived of the privacy which He desired in the area around this beautiful sea. Often the crowds were inconsiderate of His personal needs, but He was not annoyed at their intrusion. Occasionally He and His disciples entered a boat and made a short voyage in order that they might have some quietness and get a little rest. When they landed on the shore, the crowds were awaiting their arrival. Our Lord's heart went out in tender love and compassion toward the multitudes of needy humanity, because they impressed Him as being like sheep without a shepherd. He saw that they were hungering for spiritual truth which the professional teachers of formal religion had not provided. Even though their faith was imperfect and their hopes indefinite Christ gladly responded to their appeal. "He began to teach them many things."

When the day was far spent the apostles reminded Christ that they were in a desert place, that the lunch hour was far passed, and suggested that He send the crowd into the near-by villages that they might obtain food. The sight of this weary multitude, far from home and without any food, touched the Lord Jesus deeply. His conversation with His disciples elicited a confession of their inability to feed the multitude. They magnified the insufficiency of the boy's lunch, which consisted of only five small barley loaves and two small fishes, and which was all of the food they could find in the entire crowd.

After the lad presented his picnic lunch to Christ, the Master bade the multitude to sit down in groups. Our Lord then took the loaves and the fishes, thanked God for them, blessed them, broke them and gave them to the apostles, who in turn gave them to the multitude and all of them ate until they were filled. When the hunger of all had been satisfied, Christ immediately sent His disciples away before He dismissed the crowds. He did that because He did not want them involved in the attempt to make Him a king.

Having sent His disciples across the Sea of Galilee and having dismissed the people to their homes, Christ went to the mountain where He could be alone and refresh His spirit through fellowship with His Father. There He was engaged in earnest prayer.

When the disciples embarked the weather was calm and fair. However, they had not gone very far until daylight ceased, clouds gathered and winds arose. Being strong men and accustomed to rowing, they were not easily frightened by the waves. The wind came down from the surrounding hills with such fury that even strong and experienced rowers, like the fishermen apostles, could not make much progress against it. Against terrific gales the disciples toiled at their oars, straining and trying to keep their boat headed in the right direction to reach the destination to which they had been sent. The wind was contrary to the course which Christ had prescribed for them. In spite of the storm against which they were battling and the slowness of their progress, they did not cease to row. Their spirit and attitude were expressed in the words of him who said, "Though dark be my way, 'tis mine to obey." One certainly admires their dauntless courage and heroic obedience.

The winds were so contrary that their boat was being tossed to and fro in the waves of the sea which had been whipped into a foaming fury. The storm was so fierce that the boat in which they were rowing was threatened with destruction. Note that the storm came upon them when Christ was absent from them. Moreover, it was encountered when they were in the way of duty. Christ had commanded them to get in the boat and row across the sea.

For nine hours they had pulled their oars and most of the time had rowed against the wind. They had toiled until their arms were tired and their muscles were aching, but they had not made much headway; in fact, only three miles. Against their own wishes they had tried to cross the sea in obedience to the command of Christ. They knew they were doing exactly as He had told them. Their strength was practically exhausted when the merciless storm was still at its height and the sea was raging under the lash of the winds. Knowing full well that they were in line with the Lord's will, their disappointment was keener and their despair was deeper.

From His eminence on the mountain Christ saw and knew all about their trouble. They needed Him and to them He started about three o'clock in the morning. Since He had sent them into the storm, He was determined to watch over them during it. In the midst of their anxiety, weariness and discouragement Christ suddenly appeared, "walking on the sea." The fear of the disciples yielded to mental terror as they beheld what to them appeared to be a ghost walking on the water. In their fear and trouble they cried out in terror. Above the roaring waves the disciples heard the strong and reassuring words of the Lord, "Be of good cheer! it is I; be not afraid." Truly there is no occasion for gloom or fear when Christ is present.

Even so it is now. He has departed from this scene of earthly ministry and entered into the high and holy place where "He ever liveth to make intercession for us" (Hebrews 7:25). It is encouraging to realize when we face life's contrary winds that He knows, He loves, He cares and He intercedes. That we are now "in the midst of the sea," so to speak, is evident from the excessive and incessant unrest, discontent and selfishness of all sorts and on every hand.

Christ entered the boat with them and the storm ceased. Christ is Lord of both the bread and the billows. He can multiply the one and mollify the other. With Christ beside the disciples nothing mattered any more. As Christ came treading the waves, so He puts all of the swelling tumults of life under His feet. That is why Christians ought not to be afraid. Many have proved in their experience that when Christ is present the storm becomes a calm, the tumult becomes a peace, the undecable becomes decable, the unbearable becomes bearable, and people pass the breaking point and do not break. To walk with Christ is to conquer the storm.

Life is like a voyage at sea. All of us are voyagers on the Sea of Time. Life is ever beset with contrary winds. We set our faces toward a goal of ambition. Before we have gone far a veritable gale of disappointment, opposition or discouragement hits us in the face.

There are many aching and hungry hearts in any audience today. The hearts of many parents are breaking over their children whom they have failed to rear in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Many contrary winds of disappointment, discouragement, impaired health, broken family ties and lost hopes are blowing across the lives of people in my audience. Satan attacks the Christian with great fury. Having failed to hold us back from the constraint of the love of Christ in following after spiritual things, he will seek to benumb sensitiveness to the things of God by the opiates of pleasure, of passion and of pride.

The winds are contrary to all who are possessed of earnest purpose and are determined to do something for God. If you endeavor to live a pure life, you will find your old nature contrary to you. If you endeavor to live a separated life, you will find the world, your former companions and Satan opposed to you. Do not quit trying to live an earnest Christian life because of difficulties that may beset you. What you have to encounter others have faced and overcome before. Do not give up because of difficulties.

Contrary winds often bring us to our better selves. Life's best is reached through hardship. There are lessons to be learned in the storms that the believer could never learn in fair weather. Through our battling with adversities we are brought by the Lord to our better selves. Contrary winds often bring us to better things. Frequently we choose a course for life's voyage which is not best. God then uses a contrary wind to bring us to better and nobler things. Saul of Tarsus had his sails set as a Pharisee and a persecutor of the saints, but a contrary wind blew him off his course on the Damascus road and he became Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles. John Bunyan had his sails set for his voyage as a minister, but a contrary wind arose and he was cast into Bedford Jail, where he languished for twelve long years; but who will say that "wind of persecution" blew nothing but ill? Out of that prison, from the pen of John Bunyan, came *Pilgrim's Progress*, the greatest book, next to the Bible, in print today. No man is held in higher esteem among Baptists than John Bunyan.

I can't explain all of the contrary winds in your life, but I bring you this encouraging challenge, row on in your changed course. God will bring good out of it all.

"Not till the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly,
Shall God unroll the canvas,
And explain the reason why.

The dark threads are as needful,
In the Weaver's skillful hand,
As the threads of gold and silver,
In the pattern He has planned."

Life's contrary winds bring Christ to us and He stills the storm. It is very difficult to keep cheerful and courageous when life's storms threaten, hopes fade out in the sky and the tempests rage. It is easy to drift when Satan waylays us and the world allures us. Each of us needs Christ on the tempestuous sea of life. He sees all, so when we have Him with us we need not fear whatever comes.

"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."