

They shall mount up...

ON EAGLES' WINGS



AIRY NUGGETS

...with wings of eagles.

Isaiah

40:31purpose

September 2012

I Believe God Acts 27 Steven J. Faulkner

One morning in early June, I sat alone on a beach on Corpus Christi Bay enjoying the beauty and solitude of the moment. The sun was very warm, yet the breeze from the bay was fresh and cool; the sky was a burning blue, and the water sparkled in the morning sunlight. Off in the distance towards the mouth of the bay, a small white sail gleamed against the cloudless horizon; and the only sounds to be heard were the calls of the gulls overhead, and the rhythmic report of each wave as it rolled up onto the sandy shore. How beautiful and utterly peaceful the world seemed to be at that moment. Yet, in a few short hours, the peace of this scene was shattered by dark clouds, high winds, and violent waves. Have you noticed how quickly our circumstances in this world can change? And yet, for the child of God, the one thing that never changes, regardless of our circumstances, is the care of our Lord for His own: "...for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," (Hebrews 13:5).

As we read Acts 27, we find the Apostle Paul on board a ship, headed for Italy. This was not a pleasure trip in any sense of the word; Paul was being conducted to Rome, as ordered by Festus, one of the Roman governors, there to stand trial for his life before the imperial head of the Empire. As we begin this chapter, we find Paul in the charge of one Julius, a Roman centurion, whose job it was to see that Paul arrived in Rome for his trial. We read in verse 1, "*And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band.*"

From the world's perspective, this entire scene might be considered to be anxiety provoking in the extreme; however, even though Paul was a prisoner of Rome and was on his way to trial before the most powerful heathen ruler of that day, he was not alone, nor was he afraid. He knew that he was in the center of God's will, even under such circumstances. Back in Acts 23, the Lord had stood with Paul and had revealed to him His plan while a violent mob in Jerusalem yet sought the apostle's life. "*And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome,*" (verse 11). Paul could be of good cheer despite all his apparent troubles. Regardless of the stormy clouds that were

gathering, the plan for Paul was the Lord's; and come what may, the Lord would be with him, and Paul would arrive safely in Rome just as it had been revealed to him. He had the assurance of the Word of God.

My dear Christian friend, have you ever been discouraged when things did not go well for you? Perhaps, you cried unto the Lord with all your heart, yet the trial seemed to persist beyond what you thought you could endure. Times like this can be very lonely and frightening; but, if you are a child of God, you are never really alone: "...lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen," (Matthew 28:20).

Paul knew that he must go to Italy, and that this was the will of the Lord for him; yet even the voyage to fulfill God's plan seemed fraught with serious difficulties. Still, early on, things did appear to be going relatively well. Paul was allowed to travel with his companions, the seas were calm enough, and even Julius was courteous and respectful of his prisoner as we read in verses 2 and 3, "*And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian being with us. And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself.*" The smooth sailing, however, did not last. Too much time was spent on the southern coast of Crete, and it was perhaps September or October before the captain decided to launch from the Fair Havens, against the counsel of Paul. Then began a perilous adventure on the high seas that lasted a fortnight, and threatened the lives of everyone on board the ship. We read in verses 13-20, "*And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete. But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive. And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat: Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven. And we being exceedingly tossed with a*



tempest, the next day they lightened the ship; And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship. And when neither sun nor stars

in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away."

From the description above, you can just imagine the fearful ordeal for Paul and the entire ship's company as the vessel clawed its way along the southern coast of Crete. Things were going well, when suddenly and without warning, the ship was hit by hurricane force winds making further progress in the desired direction quite impossible; in order to keep from immediate disaster, the ship was forced to turn and be driven before the wind, which would have placed it on a course heading for the middle of the Mediterranean and ultimately the North African coast. The winds did not abate for two weeks, and during that entire time, the skies were black such that no bearings could be taken or landmarks seen; the seas throughout that time were high, violently rocking the ship such that it was in danger of coming apart at its seams. Imagine the ferocity of the howling winds and the angry sea, the creaking of the beams, and the ripping of sail. The salty spray and the violent waves would have washed fiercely over the deck as the ship pitched and rolled in the blackness, hour by hour for seemingly endless days. There was no time to eat or sleep, and all energy must be devoted to the job of keeping the ship afloat by jettisoning cargo and equipment, and by heroic attempts to keep the vessel intact. Such would have been the desperate struggle for Paul and his shipmates, and it went on without respite for a couple of weeks, until the physical capacity of all on board was utterly spent, and death appeared to be imminent.

Most on board lost hope, but not Paul. Throughout the ordeal, Paul held firm to the promise of God, and so he was able to be a source of encouragement, strength, and even leadership for everyone on board, including the captain and the Roman guard. Paul, the prisoner, addressed the ship's company in verses 22-25, "*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.*"

Amid raging storm and failing hearts, Paul could bid his fellow passengers and crew to be of good cheer, "*for I believe God.*" Even in the very midst of the trial, the Lord was with His servant, and He reassured him with the precious promises of His Word. God's Word was evidence enough for Paul, even though the storm continued to rage around him. Indeed, after the Word of the Lord was given, there were yet more emergencies to come including an attempted abandonment by the crew, fear of

crashing on the rocks, and finally the beaching of the ship and its breaking up such that all were cast into the sea. But all on board were spared, just as the Lord had said. During the crisis, Paul believed God, that it would all happen just as the Lord had revealed to him, even though the storm continued to rage after the angel's words were spoken.

My dear Christian friends, do you believe God? Do you take Him at His Word, despite what you see with your eyes? Alas, sometimes we fail to see Him in the storms of life because our eyes are focused on the storm, and not on Him. Yet, His eyes are ever upon us: "*The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and His ears are open unto their cry,*" (Psalm 34:15). We have so many precious promises in His Word that we can cling to in even the most trying of circumstances. Yet, how often do we look for that fleece in order to believe, like Gideon of old (Judges 6:37-40); how often do we refuse to believe what the Lord has already told us, like Thomas after the Lord had risen (John 20:25)? Do we really need a tangible sign from the Lord in order to trust that He continually cares for us? How blessed we are when we can simply believe what He has told us in His Word. We read of His good intentions towards His own in Jeremiah 29:11, "*For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.*" We read in Romans 8:28, "*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose*". Come what may in this life, God is ever vigilant, and He will keep and preserve His own: "*He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: He that keepeth thee will not slumber,*" (Psalm 121: 3).

My dear friend, it is my prayer that all who read these words have trusted Christ as your Savior. If that is so, then be of good cheer, and hold fast His Word which will encourage your souls, even though the storms around you may rage: "*Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God,*" (Psalm 43:5). On the other hand, if you have not yet trusted in Christ for salvation, I pray that you hear His loving call right where you are, and believe on Him just now: "*Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,*" (Matthew 11:28). Be of good courage dear friend, no one who believes on Christ for salvation will be lost!



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