

## JOURNEYING WITH GOD

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AC 27:21 After the men had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. <sup>22</sup> But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. <sup>23</sup> Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me <sup>24</sup> and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' <sup>25</sup> So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. <sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."

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There is a great difference between people who spend their lives living for God and those who spend their lives living for self. The difference is not seen in such things as land or money or status, but in the inner life itself. The God-oriented life is more successful in living. That is to say, the God-oriented life is more successful because it deals with life itself and not the trappings that surround life. For, you see, life is a journey, and like the Apostle Paul, the life many of us have chosen is the life of Journeying for God.

In the life of the great Apostle to the Gentiles, this journey to Rome, described by Dr. Luke, who was also on board that ship, was a great example of what it takes to Journey with God.

In the example of the Apostle Paul, we see a man who, in his journeying with God, put LOVE ABOVE HATE. Paul had every human reason to hate those who attacked him so viciously for his religion, who imprisoned him without a reason, and who denied him his human dignity of freedom. He could have easily hated weak Felix for trying to please the Jews and get a bribe from him. He could have hated pleasant Festus who also wanted to please the Jews as a new governor of the province. He could have hated sinful Agrippa and his equally sinful sister Bernice, who, as Jews, knew that Paul was innocent and should be released. But Paul, with God at his side and in his heart, rises above hate, and both pities and loves his enemies. Barclay writes, "This one man Paul has in him a power that raises him head and shoulders above all others in any company."

Paul now finds himself aboard an Egyptian grain ship, which supplied corn to Rome, sailing toward Roman imprisonment. He is treated well by the kindness of Julius, the Roman Centurion, of the Augustan Cohort. And Paul has two friends aboard that ship, Dr. Luke and Aristarchus, who chose to be Paul's servant in his faithfulness to Paul. But the rest, including kind Julius, are enemies. They will kill Paul if he tries to escape just as surely as they will kill other prisoners bound for Rome who are aboard that ill-fated ship. Paul could hate these his enemies. But he could not hate them and be a true Christian.

MT 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'<sup>44</sup> But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,<sup>45</sup> that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.<sup>46</sup> If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?<sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?<sup>48</sup> Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

LK 6:27 "But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,<sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.<sup>29</sup> If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic.<sup>30</sup> Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.<sup>31</sup> Do to others as you would have them do to you."

<sup>35</sup> But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.<sup>36</sup> Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Paul put Jesus' words into action; Paul put Love above Hate. It is easy to hate. But hate exacts too great a toll on the hater. Someone said, "Forgive other. You are giving the gift of peace to your soul." I am reminded of William Blakes'

## THE POISON TREE

I was angry with my friend:  
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.  
I was angry with my foe:  
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I watered it in fears,  
Night and morning with my tears;  
And I sunned it with smiles,  
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night,  
Till it bore an apple bright.  
And my foe beheld it shine.  
And he knew that it was mine,

And into my garden stole  
When the night had veiled the pole;  
In the morning glad I see  
My foe outstretched beneath the tree.

We cannot kill our enemies with hate, for hate kills us. We must rise above hate and love even our enemies. Was it Lincoln who said that the best way to kill your enemies was to make them your friends? Perhaps the best way to kill our enemies, as someone said, is to love them to death. Paul loved his enemies and wanted to see them all live, and become followers of Christ!

In this classic shipwreck narrative, Paul not only puts LOVE ABOVE HATE, HE puts FAITH ABOVE FEAR. <sup>AC 27:13</sup> When a gentle south wind began to blow, they thought they had obtained what they wanted; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. <sup>14</sup> Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the "northeaster," swept down from the island. <sup>15</sup> The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. <sup>16</sup> As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure. <sup>17</sup> When the men had hoisted it aboard, they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Fearing that they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. <sup>18</sup> We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard."

William Barclay writes about this episode: "A very unexpected south wind made the plan seem easy: and then there struck them the terrible wind from the north-east. It was a gale and the peril was that if they could not control the ship they would inevitable be blown on the Syrtis Sands which were off North Africa and which were the graveyard of many a ship."

The captain and the crew were scared. Reading between the lines, the fear is almost tangible. Even the most experienced seamen know fear and often lived for long periods with fear. But the ship they were on was quite unsafe in such winds. Barclay again says, "The peril of the ship was by this time really desperate. These corn ships were not small ships. They could be as large as 140 ft. long and 36 ft. wide and of 33 feet draught"

The ship was made to haul grain, not to maneuver the mighty waves. It only had one main sail, a large square sail, and the ship itself was made the same in front and behind. From Barclay's description we can see that the ship could only be navigated awkwardly in regular seas. When the winds were calm the oarsmen paddled it forward from each side. Being in such a ship with such a gale in late September or early October on the Mediterranean was a fearful thing indeed! The Zondervan Bible gives a synopsis: **13-15** Shortly after the decision to winter at Phoenix was made, a gentle southern breeze began to blow; and it appeared that they would have no trouble in crossing the Gulf of Messara that began west of Cape Matala on the southern coast of Crete. But no sooner had they rounded the cape and entered the gulf than they were caught in a hurricane coming from Mount Ida to the north. Sailors called this wind the Euroquilo (Gr. *Eurakylon*)--a hybrid word from the Greek *euros* meaning "east wind" and the Latin *aquilo* meaning "north wind"--so "Northeaster" (NIV). Before it they were helpless.

In their helplessness they were greatly afraid. Fear reigned in their lives, until Paul put FAITH ABOVE FEAR. Paul had the answer to fear, for he had Christ in his life. In 2 Tim. 1:7, the Bible says, "For God hath not given us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind." Barclay says again, "The man who has Christ in his heart and the Risen Christ by his side need fear no man. The dignity of God is on him and beside that human dignities are pale and bloodless things."

1 Pet. 3<sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened."

Mt. 10:<sup>28</sup> Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

John 14:<sup>27</sup> Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

No doubt Paul knew these words of Christ. He had been told time after time to have no fear. For example, God said to him in Corinth: <sup>AC 18:9</sup> One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. <sup>10</sup> For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." Now while others are quaking, Paul becomes the captain of the ship under the Master of the stars. Barclay writes: "And then an amazing thing happened, for it is quite clear that Paul took command. The prisoner had become the captain, for he is the only man with any courage left...The man of God is the man whose courage stands when terror invades the hearts of others. He is a leader of men because he himself is led by God."

The one thing God demands of us all is courage. As Paul Tillich wrote, we need "The Courage to Be." In the face of great adversity, Paul looked to God and God promised him that no one's life would be lost because of him. Paul's courage came from God. He had the courage wrought of faith. He had the courage to stand as a man. He had the courage to stand as a believer. Paul could say to them in absolute assurance--

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PAUL PUT LOVE ABOVE HATE, FAITH ABOVE FEAR, AND HOPE ABOVE DESPAIR.<sup>19</sup> On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. ACTS 27:<sup>20</sup> When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.

We further read these words: AC 27:27 On the fourteenth night we were still being driven across the Adriatic Sea, when about midnight the sailors sensed they were approaching land.<sup>28</sup> They took soundings and found that the water was a hundred and twenty feet deep. A short time later they took soundings again and found it was ninety feet deep.<sup>29</sup> Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight.<sup>30</sup> In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow.<sup>31</sup> Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved."<sup>32</sup> So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it fall away

Henry David Thoreau wrote: "Most men lead lives of quiet **desperation** and go to the grave with the song still in them."

These sailors were in desperation. They had given up all hope. They had been busy clinging to life to eat. Listen to Dr. Luke's description: AC 27:33 Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. "For the last fourteen days," he said, "you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food--you haven't eaten anything."<sup>34</sup> Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head."<sup>35</sup> After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat.<sup>36</sup> They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves.

Not only were they too busy to eat, they were in such despair that they refused to eat. They thought they would soon die, and what good is food to a dead man? But now Paul tells them that they will live. More, he prays to God and blesses the food and they are encouraged to eat, and they do. One can see the light slowly but surely come on on board that vessel full of corn and 276 souls. No life will be lost because they have done as Paul told them. They followed the orders of God and lived.

Like Love and Faith, Hope is something that we have to have to Live. Many experiments have been done that show that even animals deprived of hope soon die. We cannot live without hope. When the future grows so dark that we cannot see any light, we give up the ghost and die.

Listen to what the New Testament says about Hope: MT 12:21 In his name the nations will put their hope."

AC 2:26 Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;

my body also will live in hope,

RO 4:18 Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

Rom. 5:2 "we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. "

Rom 8: 24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Rom 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Titus 2:13 while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Heb. 6:19 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.

They lost hope on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day when they lost the stars that guided them. In Paul's time they used the sextant to find from the stars and constellations where they were. With such heavy clouds, they lost all hope of staying alive. Listen: 19 On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. 20 When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.

Paul never lost hope because his hope was in his Lord and Savior, and no matter how bad things got, Jesus was with him. When the others were literally dying in the throes of despair, one little Jewish man was looking at him who is invisible and knowing that whether he lived or died, he had a future! Hope says, "I have a future." This hope Paul put ahead of any personal despair he may have temporarily felt. We stand in hope, and hope makes not ashamed because by hope God's love fills our bosoms with joy and our lives with victory!

You see, we put LOVE ABOVE HATE, FAITH ABOVE FEAR, AND HOPE ABOVE DESPAIR. When we do we know that we are sailing with the Right Captain, living with the Right Reason, and the Outcome is guaranteed.