

J.R. Miller:

When in the midst of the tempest, an angel stood by Paul and assured him that he must be brought before Caesar; which meant that he could not perish in the sea, he was assured that for his sake all on board should escape, though the ship would be lost.

"Except these abide in the ship, you cannot be saved," was the assurance. Yet Paul had said before, that there should be no loss of life on the ship. He had received this assurance, too, from the angel. If it was the divine purpose that no life should perish in this storm—then why did Paul say here, that unless the seamen stood at their posts, the passengers could not be saved? The divine assurance of safety—did not do away with the use of all proper human means for securing deliverance.

More and more the prisoner was revealed as the man for the emergency. "Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat." We must always care for our bodily health. When Elijah was fleeing from Jezebel's threat, despairing because of the seeming failure of his work, an angel found him under a juniper tree, wishing he were dead. Instead of giving him good advice, or even reminding him of the divine promises, the angel brought him something to eat. Then, after he had eaten, he slept. Food and sleep, were what Elijah needed. There are times when what people need is not a gospel tract, nor good advice, nor even a prayer—but something to eat, clothes to keep them warm.

The influence of Paul's act was magical. "They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves." By being brave, cheerful and composed in time of danger, Paul lifted up the whole ship's company into the same confident mood. By his cheerful manner and loving interest in the others—he inspired them all with confidence. There are few things the world needs more, than just such influence.

There come experiences in life when material things must be sacrificed for the sake of higher interest. In this storm the cargo was thrown overboard, in order that the ship might be beached and the men's lives saved. We cannot reach the haven of eternal rest laden down with the things of this world. When a vessel was burning near the shore, and all were leaping into the water to swim to safety, there was one man who tied his gold about his body, thinking to carry it to shore; but the moment he leaped into the water—he sank to the bottom like a stone! If he had been willing to give up his gold—his life might have been saved.

We have an illustration of this truth in the history of the flight of Cortez, on that fearful night when the Aztecs compelled the invaders to escape for their lives. The vast masses of gold that had been accumulated were more than could be carried off, as each soldier would have to fight his way through the army of the enemy. Each man was allowed to take what he would—but their commander warned them against overloading. Said he, "He travels safest in the dark night—who travels lightest." The more cautious men heeded the advice—but others were less self-restrained. Some bound heavy chains of gold about their necks and shoulders, and some filled their wallets with the bulky ingots until they literally staggered under their burdens. All who tried to carry off the gold—became an easy prey to the lances of the enemy.

Anchors are very important—but here even they must be cast off. There are anchors which hold many people from salvation or from a full consecration to Christ. Sometimes a secret sin is the chain, sometimes it is a human companionship or friendship, sometimes love for the world's riches or pleasures. Christ made this very plain when he said that if our hand or our foot causes us to sin—we should cut it off; that we would better escape into life, halt or maimed, than keep both hands and feet and perish. If we find that there is any such thing, no matter how dear it is to us—we should resolutely cut it off and cast it away!

The narrative tells us that "the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners." After a battle, a wounded enemy within the lines piteously cried for water. An officer ran to him and gave him drink. Refreshed and revived by the water, the wounded man, seeing that his benefactor was of the opposite army, drew his pistol and shot him. Something like this was the spirit of these soldiers. The centurion, however, shows us the reverse spirit—gratitude. He remembered how much they all owed to one particular prisoner, and checked the evil purpose of his men, not only saving Paul himself—but for his sake, all the prisoners.

The centurion's plan was far better than that of the soldiers. "He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. The rest were to get there on planks or on pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land in safety." We have here a beautiful parable. The voyage itself is a parable of the Christian's life voyage. The island represents heaven. Everything has to be given up to reach it. But it will be noticed that not one person was lost—all reached the land. However, not all got to the shore in the same way.

Paul a Prisoner: The Shipwreck Acts 27:27-28:10

Some swam out, while others had to cling to pieces of board, thus barely escaping. Not all Christians reach heaven in the same way. Some enter triumphantly, with song and shout; some are barely saved, gaining the shores of glory only on the shattered fragments of their earthly hopes. Happy will we be if we get into heaven at last in any way, through any difficulty or earthly loss! But it is possible for all to have the "abundant entrance," and we should strive so to live that we may secure it.