**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**ACTS-097. TEMPEST AND TRUST by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"13.* *And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete. 14. But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. 15. And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive. 16. And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat: 17. 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. 18. And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship; 19. And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship. 20. 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. 21. But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. 22. 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. 23. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, 24. Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. 25. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. 26. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.-."*

*Acts 27:13-26*

Luke's minute account of the shipwreck implies that he was not a Jew. His interest in the sea and familiarity with sailors terms are quite unlike a persistent Jewish characteristic which still continues. We have a Jew's description of a storm at sea in the Book of Jonah, which is as evidently the work of a landsman as Luke's is of one who, though not a sailor, was well up in maritime matters. His narrative lays hold of the essential points, and is as accurate as it is vivid. This section has two parts: the account of the storm, and the grand example of calm trust and cheery encouragement given in Paul's words.

**I.** The consultation between the captain of the vessel and the centurion, at which Paul assisted, strikes us, with our modern notions of a captain's despotic power on his own deck, and single responsibility, as unnatural. But the centurion, as a military officer, was superior to the captain of an Alexandrian corn-ship, and Paul had already made his force of character so felt that it is not wonderful that he took part in the discussion. Naturally the centurion was guided by the professional rather than by the amateur member of the council, and the decision was come to to push on as far and fast as possible.

The ship was lying in a port which gave scanty protection against the winter weather, and it was clearly wise to reach a more secure harbour if possible. So when a gentle southerly breeze sprang up, which would enable them to make such a port, westward from their then position, they made the attempt. For a time it looked as if they would succeed, but they had a great headland jutting out in front which they must get round, and their ability to do this was doubtful. So they kept close in shore and weathered the point. But before they had made their harbour the wind suddenly chopped round, as is frequent of that coast, and the gentle southerly breeze turned into a fierce squall from the north-east or thereabouts, sweeping down from the Cretan mountains. That began their troubles. To make the port was impossible. The unwieldy vessel could not face the wind, and so they had to run before it. It would carry them in a south-westerly direction, and towards a small island, under the lee of which they might hope for some shelter. Here they had a little breathing time, and could make things rather more ship-shape than they had been able to do when suddenly caught by the squall. Their boat had been towing behind them, and had to be hoisted on deck somehow.

A more important, and probably more difficult, task was to get strong hawsers under the keel and round the sides, so as to help to hold the timbers together. The third thing was the most important of all, and has been misunderstood by commentators who knew more about Greek lexicons than ships. The most likely explanation of lowering the gear (Rev. Ver.) is that it means leaving up just enough of sail to keep the ship's head to the wind, and bringing down everything else that could be got down (Ramsay, St. Paul, p. 329).

Note that Luke says we about hauling in the boat, and they about the other tasks. He and the other passengers could lend a hand in the former, but not in the latter, which required more skilled labour. The reason for bringing down all needless top-hamper, and leaving up a little sail, was to keep the vessel from driving on to the great quicksands off the African coast, to which they would certainly have been carried if the wind held.

As soon as they had drifted out from the lee of the friendly little island they were caught again in the storm. They were in danger of going down. As they drifted they had their starboard broadside to the force of the wild sea, and it was a question how long the vessel's sides would last before they were stove in by the hammering of the waves, or how long she would be buoyant enough to ship seas without foundering. The only chance was to lighten her, so first the crew jettisoned the cargo, and next day, as that did not give relief enough, they, or, according to some authorities, we--that is passengers and all--threw everything possible overboard.

That was the last attempt to save themselves, and after it there was nothing to do but to wait the apparently inevitable hour when they would all go down together. Idleness feeds despair, and despair nourishes idleness. Food was scarce, cooking it was impossible, appetite there was none. The doomed men spent the long idle days-- which were scarcely day, so thick was the air with mist and foam and tempest--crouching anywhere for shelter, wet, tired, hungry, and hopeless. So they drifted for many days, almost losing count of the length of time they had been thus. It was a gloomy company, but there was one man there in whom the lamp of hope burned when it had gone out in all others. Sun and stars were hidden, but Paul saw a better light, and his sky was clear and calm.

**II.** A common danger makes short work of distinctions of rank. In such a time some hitherto unnoticed man of prompt decision, resource, and confidence, will take the command, whatever his position. Hope, as well as timidity and fear, is infectious, and one cheery voice will revive the drooping spirits of a multitude. Paul had already established his personal ascendency in that motley company of Roman soldiers, prisoners, sailors, and disciples. Now he stands forward with calm confidence, and infuses new hope into them all. What a miraculous change passes on externals when faith looks at them! The circumstances were the same as they had been for many days. The wind was howling and the waves pounding as before, the sky was black with tempest, and no sign of help was in sight, but Paul spoke, and all was changed, and a ray of sunshine fell on the wild waters that beat on the doomed vessel.

Three points are conspicuous in his strong tonic words. First, there is the confident assurance of safety. A less noble nature would have said more in vindication of the wisdom of his former advice. It is very pleasant to small minds to say, Did I not tell you so? You see how right I was. But the Apostle did not care for petty triumphs of that sort. A smaller man might have sulked because his advice had not been taken, and have said to himself, They would not listen to me before, I will hold my tongue now. But the Apostle only refers to his former counsel and its confirmation in order to induce acceptance of his present words.

It is easy to bid men be of good cheer, but futile unless some reason for good cheer is given. Paul gave good reason. No man's life was to be lost though the ship was to go. He had previously predicted that life, as well as ship and lading, would be lost if they put to sea. That opinion was the result of his own calculation of probabilities, as he lets us understand by saying that he perceived it (ver. 10). Now he speaks with authority, not from his perception, but from God's assurance. The bold words might well seem folly to the despairing crew as they caught them amidst the roar of tempest and looked at their battered hulk. So Paul goes at once to tell the ground of his confidence--the assurance of the angel of God.

What a contrast between the furious gale, the almost foundering ship, the despair in the hearts of the sleeping company, and the bright vision that came to Paul! Peter in prison, Paul in Caesarea and now in the storm, see the angel form calm and radiant. God's messengers are wont to come into the darkest of our hours and the wildest of our tempests.

Paul's designation of the heavenly messenger as an angel of the God whose I am, whom also I serve, recalls Jonah's confession of faith, but far surpasses it, in the sense of belonging to God, and in the ardour of submission and of active obedience, expressed in it. What Paul said to the Corinthians (1 Cor. vi. 19) he realised for himself: Ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price. To recognise that we are God's, joyfully to yield ourselves to Him, and with all the forces of our natures to serve Him, is to bring His angel to our sides in every hour of tempest and peril, and to receive assurance that nothing shall by any means harm us. To yield ourselves to be God's is to make God ours. It was because Paul owned that he belonged to God, and served Him, that the angel came to him, and he explains the vision to his hearers by his relation to God. Anything was possible rather than that his God should leave him unhelped at such an hour of need.

The angel's message must have included particulars unnoticed in Luke's summary; as, for instance, the wreck on a certain island. But the two salient points in it are the certainty of Paul's own preservation, that the divine purpose of his appearing before Caesar might be fulfilled, and the escape of all the ship's company. As to the former, we may learn how Paul's life, like every man's, is shaped according to a divine plan, and how we are immortal till our work is done, and till God has done His work in and on and by us. As to the latter point, we may gather from the word has given the certainty that Paul had been praying for the lives of all that sailed with him, and may learn, not only that the prayers of God's servants are a real element in determining God's dealings with men, but that a true servant of God's will ever reach out his desires and widen his prayers to embrace those with whom he is brought into contact, be they heathens, persecutors, rough and careless, or fellow-believers. If Christian people more faithfully discharged the duty of intercession, they would more frequently receive in answer the lives of all them that sail with them over the stormy ocean of life.

The third point in the Apostle's encouraging speech is the example of his own faith, which is likewise an exhortation to the hearers to exercise the same. If God speaks by His angel with such firm promises, man's plain wisdom is to grasp the divine assurance with a firm hand. We must build rock upon rock. I believe God, that surely is a credence demanded by common sense and warranted by the sanest reason. If we do so believe, and take His word as the infallible authority revealing present duty and future blessings, then, however lowering the sky, and wild the water, and battered the vessel, and empty of earthly succour the gloomy horizon, and heavy our hearts, we shall be of good cheer, and in due time the event will warrant our faith in God and His promise, even though all around us seems to make our faith folly and our hope a mockery.