

Call to Obedience
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THE WINDS WERE CONTRARY

...the winds were contrary...and so we went to Rome.—Acts 27:4; 28:14

A commentary on Paul's perilous journey to Rome

The winds were contrary summarizes the book of Acts, the only biblical history of the church. It not only describes the fledgling church, but also the kind of journey every saint is to expect until he reaches the heavenly shore.

Just as in the days of the apostle Paul, so it has always been *that we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God* (Acts 14:22). Even Paradise could not boast of fair weather, for as soon as it was planted, the devil entered it to unleash his gale-force winds of evil. Friends, in the advancement of God's kingdom, there is no place where the winds will be calm for any length of time. The winds were contrary throughout Jesus' ministry. Just look at these phrases: then Jesus was led of the Spirit to be tempted of the devil... the devil took Jesus and set him on a pinnacle of the temple... Satan entered Judas at the Lord's communion table! Wherever Jesus was the devil was there also!

Be sure of this, my friend, wherever you go today, Satan will go there also. He will try to get you at some street corner, at the office, or in the field. He will make you fall if you leave home without your spiritual armor on: if you leave your belt of truth hanging in the closet, your breastplate of righteousness standing by the door, your gospel shoes under your bed, or if you leave your shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit and the helmet of salvation behind you. Satan will set a trap for you wherever you go.

You will face contrary winds every day as surely as there is a sun in the sky. If you say at daybreak, "I will pray whenever I get a chance today", you just gave away your victory. Before long the wrong words will come out of your mouth, you will look at forbidden fruits and display an improper attitude. The most foolish thing a man can do is to leave his home unarmed and spiritually naked. A fool says, "I have no time to pray", but later on he finds all kinds of time to attempt to repair the damage his prayerlessness has produced.

The winds are contrary. They were so in Paradise, they were so for the patriarchs, they were so for Moses to get Israel out of Egypt, and they were so for Israel on their way to Canaan, they were so in the Promised Land. So the only biblical history of the church ends with, *the winds were contrary... and so we went to Rome*.

Now, we can add another truth: that even though the winds were contrary, **the destination was reached**. Through all the storms of life, Abraham did become the father of many nations, Moses did get Israel out of Egypt, Israel did enter Canaan, and

Jesus did defeat the devil. He was faithful, He prevailed, He made it to the cross, He rose again from the dead and He now sits triumphant in His Father's throne. Don't quit, never give up following the Master. Paul did make it to Rome. These men all had learned that no place is safe from the wiles of the devil. Oh, dear saint, we must take out our reverse gear, we must never entertain the option of backing out of the race that is set before us to win the prize of sitting with Jesus in His throne.

Yet, let us consider another irrefutable fact: although the winds are contrary... the destination is reachable... **yet not without much loss.** *And [Paul] said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives* (Acts 27:10).

This is what Paul told everyone on the ship to Rome. He didn't talk about a little skirmish, a little sparring with the devil, a little loss. No - this voyage would be beset with disasters, with much loss, even to their lives. Since all survived we know this means that they all would experience the loss of comfort, of their precious possessions and of all their expectations for the journey. But to Paul this journey meant eventual martyrdom. However, Paul would not die until his mission to Rome was completed, till he would strike a fatal blow at the very heart of the Roman Empire - at its political genius, its military supremacy, its judicial cunning, its pride and pomp. When Paul walked into Rome with the Gospel of Christ's kingdom, all hell shook and all heaven rejoiced. The Roman Empire was doomed.

Friend, was it worth it? We are all beneficiaries because that little battle-scarred man with a chain around his ankle started to convert many in Rome also giving us the books of Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon while he was the prisoner of Jesus Christ there. Every good thing in the kingdom of God from Adam on has come to us through men and women who stuck it out when the going got tough. If you are half-hearted, nothing of eternity will come out of you.

The winds are contrary - the destination is reachable - yet, not without much loss. Now, let us look at a few brief phrases from Acts 27 and 28 to bring this journey more to life:

The winds were contrary...we sailed slowly...passing with difficulty...sailing was now dangerous...tempestuous winds arose ...we secured the skiff with difficulty...we used cables to undergird the ship ...exceedingly tempest tossed...we threw the ship's tackle overboard...neither sun nor stars appeared for many days...all hope that we would get saved was given up...we must run aground...we threw out the wheat into the sea...the bow got stuck ...the stern was broken up.

But the centurion, willing to save Paul...commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land: And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land. Acts 27:43-44.

Does anybody want to get on board? Following Jesus is not a walk in the park, it is not a church picnic. Do you want to go with a man of God? Friend, this is not fiction - it is history, it is reality. If your winds are calm for too long you're likely not headed for Rome. You are more likely to watch the horse races with Herod in the hippodrome of

Caesarea. Here at the close of the book of the Acts of the Apostles is a call of God to your heart to get onto His journey, to strike at the heart of evil at any cost, to make dead men live again. Are you on board?

Finally and briefly, here are some additional observations on the subject:

1. Sometimes the wind is from the devil, sometimes from God, sometimes it arises out of circumstances. Do not try to figure out who sent the wind or why it was sent. This will only distract you and waste your time. Rather put all your energy into reaching your Rome. Keep your eye on your destination or you'll miss it.
2. Learn to spread your wings like an eagle. Use the updrafts of the storms and remember this: all the danger you see is only *perceived* danger but not *real* danger. Paul was never in real danger. **While he was in the storm, God saw him already preaching in Rome.** God will never forsake the righteous, the righteous are never in real danger. It only looks like they are.
3. What resistance training is to sports, making better athletes; storms are for the saints. They will become stronger as they persevere; they hereby become equipped for greater responsibilities in the kingdom of God. Oh, there is so much work to do on the upper levels of God's kingdom, but most of this work remains undone because most Christians will not pass the tests on the lower levels.
4. When you see Jesus, you will discover that what you thought were great storms, trials and tribulations were only little puffs of wind after all, for it says: *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory* (2 Cor. 4:17). And the glory you will be in will be so extravagant that you may feel ashamed that you were not allowed to suffer more to get it.

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