

## OVERCOMING THE STORMS OF LIFE

### *I John 5:4, Acts 27:13-44*

How do you act in a storm?

Our previous dog a Cocker Spaniel Freckles was terrified of storms. When we lived in North Alabama we often would have thunderstorms. If I was working in my home office she would get under my desk as close to me as possible. She still gets very anxious and searches for one of us if she hears thunder.

We all react differently in life's crises, in the storms and stress that come to each of us. Some of us try to run, others pray, some have hysterics, some give up in despair, others face the battle head-on.

***I John 5:4***, the Apostle John writes, ***"For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith."*** I have felt led by God to interrupt my series on the Sermon on the Mount and take the next few week and focus on "We Are Overcomers."

In ***Acts 27:13-44*** we have the example of one of God's great men showing us how to react as Christians in a crisis, how to be a saint in a storm.

The scene opens with a conference aboard the ship. There are nearly 300 men on this ship, but the conference seems to involve only four of them: Julius, who represents the military power of Rome - the man in charge of the prisoners on board. Then there is the owner of the ship, possibly the man who also owns most of the cargo - representative of capital. The third man is the captain of the boat, the man of the sea. Finally, there is Paul, a preacher and a prisoner.

They are trying to decide: shall we stay in the Port called by the deceptively nice sounding name, Fair Havens - and maybe be stuck here all winter - or shall we try to make Phoenix, a harbor in Crete, a better port, and more advantageous harbor?

Julius wants to sail, the owner feels they should sail, the captain is willing to sail - only Paul feels they should go no farther. But he is out-voted by the others (after all, what does a preacher-prisoner know?) who feel they can somehow make a better port in which to spend the winter. So, they set sail on a day when the south wind is blowing softly - what a great day for sailing!

But winds change, and this one suddenly shifts direction, and the delightful sailing breeze is now a "northeaster" blowing upon them in terrifying fury! And this storm is no summer squall that is over in about thirty minutes. In fact it rages for hours, then a day, two days, seven days, ten days, and at the end of two weeks they are still in the middle of a storm that won't quit!

The situation aboard ship is hopeless. The men are ready to give up in despair. They are sure death is near. They haven't seen sun or moon or stars in many days (and no 21st century navigational equipment either), they don't know where they are, where they've been, or where they are going. See them huddled together on the deck, in the hold of the ship - anxious, fearful, terrified, and waiting for the end to come.

Does that sound familiar? Many of you have been in your homes for six weeks and the news doesn't seem to be getting better. Many are faced with an impossible choice: stay in your home without a paycheck and you will eventually lose your home and possibly starve to death or go back to work and risk contracting a disease without a cure and hope you are one of the lucky ones who survives.

Those sailors threw four anchors into the sea in an attempt to steady that ship. Those anchors failed. As I read this text, I become aware that Paul had four anchors as well. These anchors steadied him

during the storm. Even though that ship was shaken and battered, Paul was able to stand steady and strong.

I would like to take a few moments this morning to share with you those anchors that kept Paul steady during the storm. You see, those same anchors are available to you and me.

## **I. THE STRONG ANCHOR OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD v.23**

Even in the midst of that raging storm, Paul found that he was not alone. The Lord came to him to minister peace to his heart. This is what faith does for the saint in a storm; it gives an unshakable confidence in God. It believes in the midst of the storm (not after the storm has passed by and the tumult subsides). Faith believes when it can't see. The way of the unbeliever is "Seeing is believing" - it is just the opposite for the person of faith: "Believing is seeing."

Regardless of the storm that tosses your life and mine, if we have the same confidence that Paul has in his relationship to the Lord, **v. 23**, then we can have faith in His promise to be with us always -

***Matt. 28:20, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."; Heb. 13:5, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."***

What an encouragement it is to know that we will never face an instant of life on our own! Every step, every valley, every mountain will be graced by His presence! ***Psa. 23:6 – "The blessed footmen of God, goodness and mercy, follow us everywhere we go!"*** It would be a blessing if we enjoyed the manifest presence of the Lord as Paul did. But, even when you cannot see Him, He is still there: watching, leading, protecting, being God.

Dr. Tony Compolo says that when he was a boy growing up in a congested and bustling city, his mother arranged for a teenage girl who lived nearby to walk home with him at the end of the day. For this, she was paid a nickel a day. But Tony rebelled in the second grade and told his mother, "I'll walk myself to school, and, if you give me a nickel a week, I will be extra careful. You can keep the other twenty cents and we'll all be better off."

After a period of pleading and begging, little Tony finally got his way. For the next two years he walked himself back and forth to school. It was an eight-block walk with many streets to cross, but he was careful and didn't talk to strangers or get distracted along the way.

Years later at a family party, he bragged about his independence and reminded his family of how he had taken care of himself as a boy. His mother laughed and added the rest of the story. "Did you really think you were alone?" she said. "Every morning when you left for school, I left with you. I walked behind you all the way. When you got out of school at 3:30 in the afternoon, I was there. I always kept myself hidden, but I was there and I followed you all the way home. I just wanted to be there for you in case you needed me."

## **II. THE STRONG ANCHOR OF THE PROMISES OF GOD v.24-25**

As Paul weathered that long, terrible storm, the Lord came to him with a precious promise. He reminded Paul that he would stand before Caesar, and that all those on the ship were to be spared as well. For Paul, just having a word from God was enough to anchor him and give him blessed assurance. Why? He knew that God was as good as His Word, **Rom. 4:21, "Being fully persuaded that God had the power to do what he has promised."**

His promises are steadfast and true! Notice what promises we have to assure of total security.

- 1. Brighter Days - Psa. 30:5, "For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning."**
- 2. Deliverance - Psa. 34:19, "A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all;"**
- 3. Everything is for our Good - Rom. 8:28: 28 "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."**
- 4. Divine Grace - 2 Cor. 12:9, But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."**
- 5. Ultimate Glory - Rev. 21:4, "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."**

His promises are based in and on His Word. It is pure, inspired and will stand when the world is in flames, **Psa. 119:89, "Your word, O Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens."**

Dr. Everek R. Storms of Ontario spent a vast amount of time studying the promises of Scripture. Writing in Contact Magazine, he said: "The Holy Scriptures contain a grand total of 8,810 promises. There are 7,487 promises from God to man (about 85 percent of all the Bible's promises).

I read a story some time back, I don't have a clue whether it was fiction, or true, but it really typifies the current American attitude, and even to some degree, the current Christian attitude about promises that we make. There was a fairly rich young man who had been taken to the hospital, critically ill. His condition worsened, and he was confined there for quite a few weeks. His doctor even had told him that he wasn't sure if he'd recover, but that they would continue to do all they could. The man was obviously scared to death, and said to the doctor, "please, doctor, do everything you can, I don't want to die, I have so much to do yet in life, and if you can help me get better, I'll even donate \$10,000 to the fund for the new hospital. The young man happily began to improve and recovered, and a few weeks later was released and went home.

Several months later, while he was out in the town, he saw the doctor on the street, and the doctor asked him how he felt. The young man said, Doc, I haven't felt better any time in my life. The doctor said that's great, because I wanted to ask you about the money you said you wanted to donate to the new hospital fund. You remember you said if you got well, you'd like to donate \$10,000, and we could really use that now. The young man said, Man, if I said that, I must have been really sick.

For some people, making and keeping promises seems to be a really tough issue, for some reason or another. But fortunately for us, there is someone whose promises are always kept.

### **III. THE STRONG ANCHOR OF THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD v. 24**

Paul is told by the Lord that this storm is a part of God working out His plan in Paul's life. At that moment in time, that storm was the safest place in the world for Paul to be! Why? Because he was in the will of the Lord and God was working in a mighty way in the situation to bring about His will for Paul's life.

Did you know that God is doing the very same thing in your life as well? It may be simple faith, but I still believe that God is Sovereign! This just means that He is in absolute control of everything that happens

in life! He is a Sovereign Lord - **Isa. 45:7, "I form the light and create darkness; I bring prosperity and create disaster."**

I, the Lord, do all these things.. Listen to the testimony of James concerning this sovereign Lord - **James 1:17, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."** If I didn't know God was on His throne, I would not want to live in this world another second, but as long as I know He controls the storms, I can weather them. He knows what is best and that is all He sends into your life and mine. The best thing we can do when the storms rage about us is run to Him for refuge and cling to Him until the storm passes, **Psa. 57:1, "Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed."**

Emperor Charles V was trying to assassinate John Brenz, friend of Martin Luther. Hearing of the plot, Brenz barely had time to grab a loaf of bread and duck into his neighbor's hayloft. There he hid fourteen days. The bread was quickly gone, but the Lord sent a hen that showed up and laid an egg each day for fourteen days. In this way, Brenz was kept alive. On the fifteenth day the chicken didn't come, and the reformer wondered what he would do. But from the street below came the cries, "The cavalymen are gone at last."

In a similar way, a dog provided for the needs of another reformer, John Craig, who was arrested during the Inquisition. On the eve of his scheduled execution, Craig escaped, but while fleeing through the Italian backcountry, he ran out of food and money. Suddenly a dog approached him, a purse in its mouth. Craig tried to drive the animal away, but it dog persisted in bringing the purse to Craig. In it was enough money to take him to freedom.

Similarly, Robert Bruce of Scotland was running for his life, fleeing persecutors. He ducked into a small cave, and a spider immediately appeared and spun a web over the opening. Bruce's pursuers fanned across the landscape, knowing he was near. Two of them approached the cave, and one of the men started to go in. The other one stopped him, saying, "He could never have gotten in there without breaking that spider's web." Bruce breathed this prayer, "O God, I thank Thee that in the tiny bowels of a spider you can place for me a shelter."

Notice this: even after Paul received the great promise of the Lord for himself and all on board the ship, the men still tried to take care of matters on their own, **v. 28-39**, and some even tried to get off the ship, **v. 30-31**. Even in the face of God's promise, **v. 21-26**, the men in the ship fought, feared and fretted in the midst of the storm. There was just one guy on board who was enjoying the trip: Paul! Why? Because he believed God! He knew God was working and he used that truth as an anchor!

Friends, we live in a day when men are abandoning ship at an alarming rate! Recent surveys have indicated that many people no longer have time for God and the church. The storms of life like Covid-19 attack them and they run from God and the church. Can I remind you that the best place you can be in the storms of life is in the ship, where the Lord wants you to be! If you leave the ship, you might face the fury of the storm on your own. If you stay where the Lord has planted you, you can be assured that caring Christians will help you face the storm in His strength!

#### **IV. THE STRONG ANCHOR OF THE PERFORMANCE OF GOD v.44**

What the Lord told Paul, and what Paul believed would happen did come to pass: everyone made it safely to the shore. God kept His Word! He spared every life and proved Himself to be as good as His Word!

God is able to work it all out! He will get you through your storm and land you safely beyond it! It may look today like the boat is going to sink. It may look like the storms of life are going to prevail. However, when the waves have all settled down, when the winds have ceased their blowing, when the rains have abated, when the storm clouds have moved off to the horizon: you will see that God was in control all along! I can promise you this; no storm in this life will be able to blow you off the course God has determined for your life! He will secure you during the storm and He will successfully deliver you to the safe harbor of His glory!

Corrie Ten Boom said it this way, "***When Jesus takes your hand, He keeps you tight. When Jesus keeps you tight, He leads you through your whole life. When Jesus leads you through your life, He brings you safely home.***"

I would just remind you this morning that our God is a strong and powerful God, **Luke 1:37; "For nothing is impossible with God."** He can do anything that needs to be done, **Eph. 3:20, "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us."** The fact of the matter is; He didn't save you to lose His grip on you in a storm. No! He saved you to take you home to glory and that is just what He will do!

Have you set your anchors deep in the Lord today? If you have, then you can weather life's storms. If you haven't, be prepared to be blown about by the winds of adversity. I would encourage you to come before the Lord and say something like this, "***Lord, I cannot fix my situation. I cannot calm the raging seas of my life and I cannot still the winds that blow against me. I need help today. By faith, I cast the anchors of your presence, your promises, your providence and your performance into my stormy sea. I am resolved to trust you to walk into my storm and speak peace when it is your will to do so. Until then, I will not fear, I will not fret, and I will not fight. I will trust you to do what is best for me.***"

When you throw in the towel and come to a place of total trust before the Lord in your storm, it gets His attention and you can be sure that He will do something about your situation!