

"HOW TO ENJOY A SHIPWRECK"
(Acts 27:1-44)
(Chuck Swindoll)

I've seen a number of bumper stickers that read, "I'd rather be sailing." That's understandable. Sea lovers can't resist the exhilaration of skimming the water in a beautiful sailing vessel pushed along by the silent power of the wind. Captains tell me they love the challenge of harnessing nature's energy and equally enjoy the calm, peaceful isolation of the open water. To hear them talk, I want to purchase a thirty-six-foot sailing yacht, take lessons, and chart a course for leisure on the sea. Then I recall my first sea voyage, which began in San Diego aboard a troop ship. The first several hours felt like a pleasure cruise, but two days later, forty-foot swells tossed our ship like a toothpick and our commander ordered each man to tie himself to his bunk.

I never see bumper stickers that read, "I'd rather be shipwrecked." No one sets sail with the hope of running aground somewhere, but experienced sailors have learned to accept certain risks in exchange for their love of the sea. You have to take the bad with the good. Likewise, Paul learned to accept suffering and difficulties as natural part of the remarkable life God had planned for him. This extraordinary man of God described the downside of greatness this way:

Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. (2 Cor. 11:24-28)

I'll admit that sometimes I would like to be a man like Paul; then I think about some of his experiences, and I feel more content with who I am and what God has for me instead. If that is the price of greatness, I'm tempted to be content with mediocrity!

Of course, Paul didn't see the future laid before him as a path to glory. His ministry had carried him far, now the will of God led him upward. If any ambition drew him, it was the opportunity to carry the good news of Jesus Christ to the pinnacle of Roman power in the hope that it might trickle down. With the decree of Festus, the Lord's promise (Acts 23:11) began to be fulfilled. Paul would finally carry the gospel to Rome—courtesy of the government. But his journey would not be a pleasure cruise. As God so often does, He took his follower through hardship on the way to his destiny. Fortunately, Paul had by now learned to take each circumstance as an opportunity to point others toward Jesus Christ. The terrifying ordeal in front of him would be no exception.

