

"THREE SPIRITUAL ANCHORS"

(Acts 27:1-44)

(Chuck Swindoll)

When 276 people boarded the grain ship to leave Fair Havens, they expected to sail no more than 40 miles down the coast of Crete to Phoenix, a more suitable harbor for spending the winter. But, as often happens, nature turned their simple plan into a terrifying ordeal. A half-day jaunt became two weeks at sea, forcing them to fight for survival through a long series of life-threatening events. As their situation worsened, each leader aboard grew silent and faded from the narrative, leaving Paul as the standout leader. While the crew threw out anchors to regain control of the ship, Paul cast three spiritual anchors to help the people cling to hope.

Spiritual Anchor #1: Assurance of God's Presence (27:22-26). The Lord reassured Paul that he and everyone aboard would survive their distress at sea. Paul passed this along to the people, letting them know that God saw their trouble and had not forsaken them. In fact, he urged them to celebrate like they already had been rescued, because the Lord had, in fact, saved them. It was only a matter of time before His rescue plan played out. Paul trusted God's word and he encouraged others to do the same.

Imagine yourself traveling back in time to stand on the deck of this ship as one of the passengers, knowing the end of the story as you do now. How would your behavior differ from the others aboard? The unpleasant conditions would affect you no less, the wind and rain would chill you just the same, but anxiety would have no effect on your outlook. So it is with your circumstances now. Struggles and difficulties will always be a part of life this side of the grave, and your life in this realm will someday end, but we have been assured of God's presence in the person of His Holy Spirit within us. And He has promised to save all who trust in Him. Furthermore, every experience—pleasure cruises and shipwrecks—will be used for our good.

Spiritual Anchor #2: Practical Encouragement (27:33-38). After many days at sea, the people had forgotten God's promise to preserve everyone alive. Some of the crew tried to get into the dinghy and abandon the ship and its passengers, but Paul intervened. As they appeared to be close to land, Paul urged the people to eat. He gave thanks to God for the food and His assurance of their safety, and he passed the bread. They had not yet spotted land, but they tossed the cargo overboard to prepare for a run toward a coast.

Paul's encouragement took physical, tangible form. Words were fine two weeks earlier; deeds made the promise of God concrete. His behavior reflected his belief that they would step onto dry land soon.

Spiritual Anchor #3: Absolute Faith (27:39-44). Throughout the ordeal, Paul demonstrated a calm, assured belief in the promise of God, and his faith became contagious. When the soldiers prepared to kill the prisoners, the centurion stopped them. His primary motivation was to preserve Paul's life, but he made his decision with confidence. The people followed Paul's lead and never gave up hope of survival.

How you face ordeals affects how others regard the Word of God. Your verbal testimony will help reveal the promises of God, but it is your personal demonstration of trust that adds validation to the message. People need to hear the gospel, but seeing the good news have its effect will do more to encourage their faith than anything you say.

