

I Will Build My Church – Part 9

Matthew 16:18-19 (KJV) And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

- This series is about discovering God's blueprint for building His church!

PRINCIPLE #12: SURVIVING A SHIPWRECK

(Acts 27:9-15)

Acts 27:9-15 (NLT) ⁹We had lost a lot of time. The weather was becoming dangerous for long voyages by then because it was so late in the fall, and Paul spoke to the ship's officers about it. ¹⁰"Sirs," he said, "I believe there is trouble ahead if we go on – shipwreck, loss of cargo, injuries, and danger to our lives." ¹¹But the officer in charge of the prisoners listened more to the ship's captain and the owner than to Paul. ¹²And since Fair Havens was an exposed harbor – a poor place to spend the winter – most of the crew wanted to go to Phoenix, farther up the coast of Crete, and spend the winter there. Phoenix was a good harbor with only a southwest and northwest exposure. ¹³When a light wind began blowing from the south, the sailors thought they could make it. So they pulled up anchor and sailed along close to shore. ¹⁴But the weather changed abruptly, and a wind of typhoon strength (a "northeaster," they called it) caught the ship and blew it out to sea. ¹⁵They couldn't turn the ship into the wind, so they gave up and let it run before the gale.

- Paul had previously been in three shipwrecks (2 Corinthians 11:25), around the time of Acts 20. No details whatsoever are given about those events – why is such detail given here? Why would Luke devote such a long section of Acts to this description of a shipwreck?
- Principle: "First the natural, then the spiritual" (1 Corinthians 15:46) – there is a spiritual lesson found here!
- Paul was finally on his way to Rome – although he had never expected to go as a prisoner. They set out from Caesarea and began to sail along the coast of the Mediterranean. However, the voyage became difficult because of strong winds. They transferred to a large grain ship from Egypt, but strong winds again hindered (it took them "many days" to travel just 130 miles). Finally, they struggled into the port known as Fair Havens, on the south side of the island of Crete. It is here that the centurion makes his fateful decision to continue the journey.

- The word of God is filled with the tragic record of men and women who began well but failed to survive spiritually ...
 - The Spirit of the Lord came on Samson, but he squandered most of his life in sensuality.
 - God chose Saul to be Israel's first king, but had to cast him aside when pride ruined him.
 - Solomon prayed for divine wisdom in his youth, but tolerated pagan evils in his old age.
 - At one time Judas was an apostle!
 - Even Paul said, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." (1 Corinthians 9:27)
- Storms you could not dream of may have come into your life or your family, or even into the church you attend. Sooner or later, you will be tested – that's the nature of life's "voyage."
- And sometimes, **THROUGH THE ERRORS OF OTHERS, THROUGH NO FAULT OF YOUR OWN**, you can become shipwrecked along life's journey. It is even possible for "church problems" to shipwreck you!
- **Matthew 24:10-13** ¹⁰And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. ¹¹And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. ¹²And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. ¹³But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.
- The Apostolic Church is built on those children of God who know how to survive the storms of life – **EVEN WHEN THEY ARE CAUSED BY PEOPLE WHO RIDE IN THE SAME BOAT!**
- **SAINTS WHO SINK THE SHIP ...**
 1. THEY CAUSE PROBLEMS BECAUSE OF THE WRONG DECISIONS THEY MAKE.
 - Fair Havens was not the most comfortable place to spend the winter months, and a fair wind at the time of sailing made it look like they could quite easily get to the port of Phoenix.
 - Paul admonished them to stay in Fair Havens because sailing was dangerous at this time of year, but **they listened to the majority rather than the man of God.**
 - No one thinks their storm is going to be bad enough to shipwreck them!

2. THEY STOP RESISTING AND END UP WAY OFF COURSE.

- If only they could have seen that their 50-mile journey around an island would take them 600 miles off-course across the Mediterranean Sea (like starting out from Saint John for Digby, NS and ending up in Chesapeake Bay by Washington, DC)!
- They hoped to outrun the storm and eventually get back on course, but **the moment they gave up resisting the wind they lost control.** Very few storms simply blow over – so stay on course!
- Sin (especially sins of the spirit!) will take you much farther than you ever intended to go!

3. THEY CONCENTRATE ON SURVIVING INSTEAD OF PROGRESSING.

- They used ropes and chains to wrap around the ship to keep it together, trying to reinforce the beams and plug the leaks. They pulled in the sails and **just concentrated on survival.**
- Entering “survival mode” may make us feel like we are still accomplishing something, but it only prolongs the inevitable.

4. THEY THROW OUT NECESSITIES IN A VAIN EFFORT TO MAKE THINGS BETTER.

- They cast out even the tackling of the ship – things they needed! Many people think that as long as they are “religious” that they will be saved. But we can’t save ourselves from the storms of life!
- **God doesn’t expect you to “throw out” your personality to please Him.** (And He doesn’t want you to demand that of anyone else!) He wants all of you! Christianity is more than just gritting your teeth in a joyless existence!

5. THEY LOSE THEIR HOPE AND SIMPLY FALL APART.

- Once people lose their hope (definition: “to desire with expectation of fulfillment”) they just end up going through the motions of religion. They no longer really believe that God will do it!
- But it was in the midst of failure that Paul stood with a message of hope: *“Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. 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. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve.”*
- Don’t get offended at the preacher who tells you that you made a wrong decision or that you are way off course; the only reason you are offended is that you know he is speaking the truth!
- **The storm wasn’t over, BUT FOR PAUL THE STORM WAS AS GOOD AS OVER BECAUSE HE HAD HEARD FROM GOD!** There might still be damage to “the ship,” but his life was saved!

- This is not the typical “happy ending” story! In fact, the worst is yet to come! That’s why many people never survive the storm – they expect the sun to shine immediately, but instead the waves sweep higher and the winds intensify.
- When the ship hit the rocks, Paul had to jump in the cold, stormy waters and swim for his life. **BUT HE STILL HAD HOLD OF GOD’S PROMISE!** While the sailors mocked, the sails ripped off, and the boat fell apart around him, Paul paced the deck and encouraged the crew, “I believe God!” He even believed God while swimming for his life!
- Paul said, *“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”* (Philippians 4:11) **It didn’t matter what happened to him once he had heard from God.** God took the sting out of the storm!
- When a local church hears from God, they may still go through rough waters, but the promise of God is still true! **DON’T LET OTHERS SHIPWRECK YOUR DREAM!**

PRINCIPLE #13: WITNESSING THROUGH WEAKNESS (Acts 28:20)

Acts 28:20 (KJV) For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that **for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.**

Colossians 4:18 (KJV) The salutation by the hand of me Paul. **Remember my bonds.** Grace be with you. Amen. (Written from Rome to the Colossians by Tychicus and Onesimus)

- Rome was the greatest city Paul had ever seen, with more than a million citizens and about a million slaves living on its seven hills. He was placed again under house arrest, constantly chained to a soldier, but able to receive friends, write letters and even preach. Once again, he shared the truth about Jesus with the Jews first, but when most of them refused him he turned to the Gentiles.
- For two years he had to pay for his own lodging, even though he was confined and waiting for his trial. Luke’s book of Acts ends here since it was written as evidence for his upcoming trial before Caesar.
- You might think that Paul’s constant imprisonment was a depressing thing for him. It certainly could have been. To the human spirit, there is nothing worse than chains. And yet, when we get right down to it, everyone has chains of some kind.

- Chains alter your perception of how powerful, intelligent and good you are; they make you feel helpless, dependent and conscious of your weaknesses.
 - In his first epistle, Paul introduced himself as “Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;) (Galatians 1:1)
 - After some suffering, he became “... the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (1 Corinthians 15:9)
 - After more suffering, he felt that he was “... less than the least of all saints ... that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” (Ephesians 3:8)
 - After two years in chains in Rome, he finally realized “... that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.” (1 Timothy 1:15)
- However, it is a common misconception that chains prevent growth and effective work, that the slightest difficulty in circumstances or drop in privileges is reason enough to simply quit.
- Paul proved from his experience that this is simply not true, for while he was imprisoned in Rome he produced some of his best epistles, he preached and prayed, witnessed and worshipped while chained to an unbelieving Roman guard. Talk about opposition!
 - “ ... for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.” (Philippians 4:11)
- I wonder which one of Paul’s guards inspired his writing which began, “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil,” (Ephesians 6:11), or which one first heard the scripture, “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end” (Ephesians 3:20-21). All of his guards were affected, and many of them became believers, even though the one who witnessed to them was in chains.
- Paul described himself in one place as “an ambassador in bonds” (Ephesians 6:20), but that description could apply to most of God’s servants. We all have chains of some kind, whether they be bonds of physical affliction, shackles of circumstance, or the fetters of a fiery trial. **The question is, will we still continue to work for God even when we don’t understand the chains?**
- REMEMBER MY CHAINS! Paul won Onesimus to the Lord while he was bound (Philemon 10); his brethren developed boldness because of his prison term, “waxing confident by my bonds,” and spoke the word without fear (Philippians 1:14).
- **This happened because Paul remembered that even while he was bound, “the word of God is not bound!” (2 Timothy 2:9).**
- Simon Peter and Paul were put on trial by the Emperor Nero along with many other Christians who were blamed for the Great Fire of Rome in AD 64. After the trial, they were confined to prison together until finally being executed on the same day. Peter was nailed to a cross as a public spectacle at Nero’s Circus, head downward at his own request since he did not feel worthy to die like his Lord. As a Roman citizen, Paul was beheaded in a less public place.
- REMEMBER MY CHAINS! Perhaps all Paul could think about as he was being led to his execution was a single Scripture he had written much earlier: “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” (Romans 8:18)
- REMEMBER MY CHAINS! Any chains we must bear for Christ pale in comparison to the weight of the chains of sin He has delivered us from.
- REMEMBER MY CHAINS! Will you work for God in spite of YOUR chains? PAUL DID!
- Let’s determine to **WITNESS THROUGH OUR WEAKNESS!**