

Four Anchors and the Glory of the Lord

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A Shipwreck and Four Anchors

Acts 27 records the shipwreck of the vessel carrying Paul to Rome. In verse 29, the sailors, fearing rocks ahead and unable to see in the darkness, cast four anchors out of the stern and wished for the day. That image has long been applied to the condition of the testimony of the church on earth — a testimony that has, in the course of history, become a wreck.

The apostle Paul was given a ministry that brought out truths not previously revealed: the one body of Christ, the church as the fullness of Him who fills all in all, Christ the head of the church in the heavenlies. These were truths entrusted to him in a special way. And yet Paul himself, while still alive, could say: all they in Asia have turned away from me. The slipping away from Paul's doctrine — and from the headship in heaven that that doctrine was centred upon — had begun before the ink was dry on his letters. The shipwreck did not wait for Paul to leave.

We are living among the wreckage now. The enemy is at work in the world around us, and evidently at work also within the testimony — in the homes of believers, in the sorrows that come on families, in the things that cannot always be spoken of openly but are felt keenly. The moral decline in the world is troubling enough; the corruption within professing Christendom is more troubling still.

But we have four anchors, and we wish for the day. The four anchors are laid out in Jude 20–21: building up yourselves on your most holy faith — praying in the Holy Spirit — keep yourselves in the love of God — looking for the mercy of

our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. Faith, prayer, keeping in His love, and the hope of His coming. These are not abstract principles. They are the specific means by which a soul holds on in a time of ruin, and together they are sufficient for the night.

But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. — Jude 20–21

Why Mercy — and Why Four

There is something notable about the opening of Jude's letter. In nearly every epistle addressed to an assembly, the greeting is grace and peace — never mercy. Mercy appears in letters addressed to individuals, and to Timothy, perhaps because of his personal state of need. But Jude opens with mercy unto you, and peace and love be multiplied. Why?

Because Jude's letter traces the full corruption of Christendom, moving through all its stages toward judgment. When you have reached that point — when the professing church has run its ruinous course — what is left but absolute sovereign mercy? It is the word appropriate for the end of things. It is the word appropriate for where we stand.

And four anchors, not three or five. Faith anchors us to what is real and revealed. Prayer anchors us to dependence on God rather than our own resources. Keeping in His love — through obedience — anchors us against the drift of a world that has lost its moorings. And the hope of His coming anchors us to what is ahead rather than what is pressing on us now. These are not separable. You cannot have true faith without prayer, or prayer without love, or love without hope. They are four because they are complete.

The First Anchor — Faith That Obeys

Faith here is connected immediately with obedience. Building up yourselves on your most holy faith is not primarily about intellectual assent to correct doctrine, though doctrine matters. It is the active living of what we believe — obedience as the expression of faith. David, in the period just before his recovery from the Philistine error, had a failure of faith: surely one day Saul will get me. And he went to the Philistines, the inveterate enemies of God's people. That was a departure of faith.

But when he was recovered, he prayed. He asked the Lord: should I go into one of the cities of Judah? And the Lord said yes. And he asked: which city? And the Lord said Hebron. He was obedient. He was dependent. Faith and prayer went together in his recovery, as they always do. Faith without prayer is faith that has stopped looking to God for direction. Prayer without faith is words without trust. The first anchor and the second are inseparable.

The Third and Fourth Anchors — Love and Hope

Keep yourselves in the love of God. The Lord's own teaching in John 15 gives us the key: if ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love. This is not a legal keeping of rules but obedience that flows from knowing that He always has our best interests before Him. We do not always feel that. When things go wrong we are tempted to think He has abandoned us to our circumstances. But the truth is that He always — always — has our good in view. An obedient soul knows that. It keeps in His love by keeping His word, trusting His heart.

The fourth anchor — looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life — is easily misread as simply the personal comfort of being taken out of trials and sorrows. That is not wrong as far as it goes, but Jude has something more specific in view. Given that the whole letter traces the corruption of Christendom, the mercy being looked for is deliverance from that ruin.

Christendom is not going to recover. It is not going to return to Acts 2. The Lord is going to bring His own home to Himself, and when He does He will present His bride to Himself glorious — without spot or wrinkle, without the divisions and sectarianism that have marked the professing testimony on earth.

That is the mercy. And we are part of the ruin we wait to be delivered from. We cannot stand apart from it and say it is the others. Daniel said we have sinned. Nehemiah said we have sinned. We too are part of this broken testimony and we too need the mercy that will finally and fully deliver us from it.

All Gods Will Worship Him

First Corinthians 8 states plainly: there is no other God save one — one God the Father, of whom all things and we for Him, and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things and we by Him. Psalm 97 takes this further in a striking and unexpected way. After describing the glory and majesty of Jehovah — His throne founded on righteousness and judgment, fire going before Him, lightnings lighting the world, mountains melting like wax — the Psalm addresses idols directly: ashamed be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols. Worship Him, all ye gods.

That phrase is arresting. How do false gods worship the Lord? It is not speaking of voluntary worship. It is describing what happens whenever power that men have invested in their gods — in nature, in intellect, in military force, in religious systems — encounters the glory of God. It capitulates. It kneels. It has no choice.

When the pillar of cloud turned and stood between Israel and the Egyptians, what happened to the gods of Egypt? Their power could do nothing. The Lord discomfited the Egyptians through the cloud. The gods they trusted were on their knees. When the soldiers came to take the Lord in Gethsemane and He said I am He, those two words threw them backwards to the ground — Roman soldiers, the most disciplined fighting force on earth, falling before a word. The gods of Rome

worshipped Him. When the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman taken in adultery and posed their clever question to the one whose finger had carved the law in stone, He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Let him who is without sin cast the first stone. They filed away in silence. The god of intellectual cleverness had worshipped Him.

Ashamed be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols. Worship Him, all ye gods. — Psalm 97:7

This will be finally and completely true at the judgment seat of Christ and at the great white throne. Every sect, every system, every departure from the truth of God that men have built in His name — all of it is a god that men have made. And every one of them will bow. The thousand churches will be gone. The Lord will align the thoughts of His own with His own thoughts, and they will at last worship Him together in perfect harmony. The divisions of Christendom will be answered not by a movement of reform but by the Lord Himself setting everything right.

What is it when I wander in my own will? That is another god — my own judgment, my own preferences, my own plans, set up in the place that belongs to Him. That too will bow. How much better to bow willingly now, before we reach the judgment seat, than to have those things brought to light then. The Lord is not ashamed to have this conversation with us. He is patient and merciful. But the accounting will come.

Occupied with His Glory

Clouds in Scripture tend to veil the glory of God rather than display it. The pillar of cloud led Israel but concealed the Lord from ordinary sight. The cloud covered Sinai. The cloud filled the tabernacle. At the Transfiguration a bright cloud overshadowed the disciples and they fell on their faces. Clouds are not the absence of His glory — they are the sign that His glory is present but not yet

fully unveiled. We live in such a time.

There are glories of the Lord that are not on the surface of Scripture. They require mining and digging. A brother with far more understanding of the Word than most would never have arrived, unaided, at the thought that Psalm 97 speaks to the gods of Egypt and the gods of Rome as they are made to bow before the glory of God. These insights were recovered by brethren who spent their lives in the Word. And the purpose of receiving such insights is not to accumulate knowledge or to be able to teach. It is to be more fully occupied with the Lord's glory.

In this world, in this time, we are not occupied enough with His glory. When family trouble comes, we are occupied with that. When the state of Christendom is before us, we are occupied with the disorder. These things are real and they press on us. But we were made for the occupation of His glory, and that is the occupation that will fill eternity. How much of it fills us now?

We have the ability, given to us by the Spirit, to gaze on His glory now — in the Word, in the history of His dealings, in the ways He has revealed Himself through types and shadows and prophecy and the life of His Son. We cast the four anchors, and we wish for the day. And while we wait, we dig for these gems that are not on the surface, so that we may be more fully occupied with the One whose glory we will share forever.