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Until the day dawns

“Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come (...). And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored them all to take food (...). And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken it he began to eat. Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves”.

Acts 27:29-36

The apostle Paul's voyage by sea to Rome, which is narrated in great detail in this chapter, did not turn out to be as successful as the helmsman and the owner of the ship had expected. At first, everything seemed all right, and circumstances were favourable indeed, but then a sudden storm made the ship the waves' playing ball. The gentle southern breeze had changed into a fierce storm that tossed and ravaged the ship so heavily that in the end, those on board gave up all hope of being saved. Many days they drifted around in the Adriatic sea in darkness as neither sun nor stars appeared (v. 20). When the fourteenth night had come, however, the sailors sensed that they were approaching land. Later on, this appeared to be the island of Malta. Fearing they might run aground on the rocks in the dark, they decided to drop the anchors and wait for the day to come. How must they have yearned for dawn to break! Some translations have them even *praying* for day to come (v. 29).

This wish or prayer can be applied to ourselves as well, both on a personal and a common level. Taken personally, this scripture can be meaningful to us in times of difficulties and distress. At times it can be quite dark in our lives, and we fervently

wish that God would dispel the darkness. Then we can say with David, “The Lord my God will enlighten my darkness” (Ps. 18:28). We know that He will answer our prayers. God is light and He dispels all darkness. But these words are also very meaningful for us on the common level. The Church of God is looking forward to the breaking of the dawn! When Christ was here on earth, He was the Light of the world (John 9:5). But He spoke about returning to the Father, and then the light would have to be spread by His followers who were to be “the light of the world” (Matt. 5:14). Christ Himself, the great Light, was going to withdraw to heaven. The children of light were to be His witnesses in a dark world, where they would shine as heavenly lights. Henceforth, the true light would be shining in their lives (see, e.g. John 8:12; 9:5; 12:35-36; Eph. 5:8; Phil. 2:15-16; 1 John 2:8).

As long as it is dark in this world and the true Light is absent, we as Christians should testify to the light. But we find ourselves in the realm of the rulers of the darkness of this age. So we are looking forward to the dawning of the day of Christ. And the greater the darkness in the world, which loves the darkness more than the light, the more fervently we long for the new morning to come. Yes, we find comfort in the knowledge that the night is far spent, and that the day is at hand (Rom. 13:12). The prophetic Word shines in this dark place, until the day dawns and the Morning Star rises in our hearts (2 Pet. 1:19). We are waiting for this new morning, even more than those who watch for the morning (Ps. 130:6).

Is it not our wish also that the day will dawn? Do we not have many reasons to eagerly long for the return of the Light, for His coming for His own as the Bright and Morning Star and for His appearance to the world as the Sun of Righteousness (Rev. 22:16)? The Church has fared no better than the ship which took Paul to Rome. The “ship” of the Church of Christ – its outward appearance and unity – has suffered extensive damage from the storm and is threatening to wreck. The crew members and passengers are in an emergency and they eagerly long for day to come. On the other hand, they are also to be blamed for it themselves, since the Church did not heed Paul’s inspired words. On the ship to Rome, Paul was just a prisoner whose words did not receive their due authority. The advice of other leaders was given more weight, which, in fact, was the source of their troubles.

Although Paul has travelled with the Church on its voyage across the sea of the world, yet he was no more than *a person in chains*. His words as to the course which had to be taken, the words he spoke on behalf of God Himself have not been heeded. In the history of the Church human traditions and opinions have had the upper hand. People were “more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul” (v. 11). And the results have

been very dramatic indeed. The course taken by the Church appears to be fatal and leads to its demise. However, after all those on board had given up all hope of being saved, Paul's voice was heard – and heeded – again, which granted the voyage a happy outcome. As soon as we acknowledge that we should have listened more carefully to the inspired words of Paul, there is new hope. While the ship itself was lost, the crew members and the passengers nevertheless made it safely to the coast, exactly as the apostle had predicted they would. Judgement on the Church in its outward appearance has become inevitable, putting it aside as God's testimony here on earth (Rom. 11:22; Rev. 3:16). But true believers do not need to fear for their lives and can even be of good courage (vv. 22,25).

Now what is the message to us in this all? First of all, that we have to acknowledge that the Church deviated from God's thoughts in a number of aspects and took a wrong course. For example, as far as the organization and the leadership of the Church are concerned, worldly standards have been introduced, and one did not heed the words spoken by Paul. The Church has been secularized by listening to the wrong leaders. But there will be hope again if one will heed the voice of Paul the apostle. For those who do not return to the law and the testimony there will be no dawn.

The apostle assures us to be of good courage. On the one hand, he determines that the Church was going to chart a wrong course (Acts 20:29-30; 2 Thess. 2:7; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 2:16-17; 4:3-4). On the other hand, however, he directs our view to God's faithfulness. Thus, in his epistles we find him both prophesying about the human failure and the ultimate fulfilment of God's plans concerning the Church. And that puts fresh courage into us and fills us with a firm assurance that all God's children will "safely reach the coast", and will safely reach their final destination.

Paul also implored those on board of the ship to take food (vv. 33-36). That is what we need in these end times, in the last days before the return of the Lord Jesus, when the storms are wailing, threatening to wreck the ship. We need spiritual food, "food in due season" (Matt. 24:45-46). We must be strengthened by the Word of God in order for us to receive new spiritual strength. They took food "as day was about to dawn" (v. 33). Just before dawn all those on board of the ship had this common meal, thus satisfying their physical needs. In the same way there is the need for healthy spiritual food in the last days before the return of Christ, when the storms are raging and the ship is in peril of perishing.

How good to see a servant of God here, who is alert and provides food at the right time! Through the ministry of God's Word we receive new strength and the needed encouragement. When all human support systems fail us, God's Word is

our one and only hold to grasp. This meal — in which, by the way, we can also see a restoration of the Lord’s supper and of the worship service according to the will of God — served to satisfy all those on board of the ship. What a strange sight this must have been: all those people quietly together in the midst of a raging storm and, admonished by the words of the apostle, taking this food with gratitude!

God has also “prepared a table” for us, however, even in the midst of the storms of the end time. Let us heed the instruction God is giving us in this present time, when His second coming is so close! Let us not be missing at this meal He has prepared for us! Let us take the food He hands us, and thus long for the day to dawn, for the “morning without clouds” (2 Sam. 23:4).

Oude Sporen 2014

