Of Shipwrecks and Sin

1 Timothy 1:18-19
18 This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare;
19 Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck:

The Vasa
- I have long been amazed
  - at the grace and beauty
    - of the old wooden sailing vessels.
- Few things in this world compare
  - to the splendor of one of those old ships
    - with all of its sails deployed.
  - And few images are as striking to me
    - as the image of that old sailing vessel
      - enduring the ferocious wind
        - and riding the fury of the waves.
- The marvel of it all, in my mind,
  - is that they were built with nothing more
    - than rudimentary tools and raw wood.
  - Years of labor,
    - many acres of hardwood,
      - and centuries of hard earned knowledge
    - went into the crafting of those
      - mighty sailing vessels of old.
  - When the work was finally finished
    - the majestic thing that sailed away from the shipyard
      - was more than just a boat,
        - it was a floating work of art,
          - a weapon of war
          - and a tool of trade.
- With the striking beauty and majesty
  - of the seafaring ship,
    - there must have been nothing more tragic,
      - in ancient times,
        - than the horror of a shipwreck.
- Several years ago I read the remarkable story
  - of a Swedish Warship, named the Vasa,
    - that was shipwrecked
      - on her maiden voyage in 1628,
        - within one nautical mile of the shipyard.
A great Swedish king
  • who ruled Scandinavia in the early 17th century
    • had ordered 4 new warships
      • to patrol the Baltic Sea.
  • One of those ships was to be greater
    • than any ship ever built at that time.
      • The king himself
        • dictated the Vasa's measurements.
      • It had two gun decks
        • and held 64 bronze cannons.
      • It is said that a total of 40 acres of timber
        • was used to build her.
  • In the end she was a masterpiece
    • of triple-laminated oaken walls
      • that were 18” thick.
    • The top of the main mast soared to 190 ft.
      • The Vasa’s rudder stood over 30 feet tall.
  • Carvings were attached on the bow
    • and round the high stern;
      • ornaments of kings,
        • knights,
        • warriors,
        • cherubs,
        • mermaids,
        • and weird animal shapes
          • – all meant to scare enemies
            • and symbolize power and courage.
    • It took 3 long years to build the Vasa
      • and, when she finally set sail,
        • she was unmatched in splendor,
          • majesty
          • and raw strength.

Tragedy!
  • However, she didn’t sail for long.
    • When the Vasa began her maiden voyage
      • August 10, 1628,
        • there was a light breeze that prevented her
          • from sailing out of the harbor right away.
      • Her sails were not even hoisted
        • until she reached the edge of the harbor.
    • She had sailed less than a mile
      • when tragedy struck.
    • A sudden unexpected storm popped up
And, though the ship performed as expected in such weather,

- Her gun ports were still open from having fired her farewell salute.

When the force of the small squall hit the ship

- She listed heavily to one side,
  - And the gun ports sank below the water level.
    - Water rushed into the ship.
  - From there, it took only a few moments for her to sink.

- The Vasa sank in 100 ft of water,
  - about 100 yards from the shore.

- The water was relatively clear and only a 100 feet deep where she sunk and
- Her masts were visible above the surface of the water
  - And because the water was relatively clear
    - her deck was somewhat visible below the waves.

What a tragedy!

- This remarkably beautiful vessel,
  - the product of long years of hard work,
    - the pride of her King's fleet,
      - now lay at rest on the ocean floor.

- From that tragic day
  - until she settled into the mud and silt
    - and finally fell into the obscurity of the ocean,
  - every ship that sailed in and out of the shipyards
    - could see the majesty of the Vasa
      - caught in the cold wet fingers of the deep.

I have no doubt that many a sailor

- looked upon that stricken ship
  - as one of the greatest tragedies of his time.

- With all of its masterful handiwork
  - the ship below the waves
    - was a constant testimony
      - to unfulfilled potential.
  - It was built to master the wind,
    - yet they watched as it shifted with the tides.
  - It was crafted to ride the waves,
    - yet it lay buried in the deep.

- Below the waterline,
  - eerily visible through the deep,
    - the ship was a haunting reminder
      - of what could have been.
  - Oh the battles
    - that might have been won!
  - Oh the mighty voyages
    - that might have been undertaken!
• Oh the glory and fame
  • that might have been claimed.
  o The hopes and dreams of years of craftsmen
    • were held captive
      • by the dismal grave of the deep.

Shipwrecked Faith
• Paul, in the opening chapter
  o of his first letter to Timothy,
    • said that some have made
      • a shipwreck of their faith.
• What a dreadful word picture,
  o shipwrecked faith!
    • Faith that was once
      • full of potential.
    • Faith that was once
      • full of dreams and hopes.
    • Faith that has now
      • been relegated to the graveyard of the deep.
• It is a terribly illustrative statement
  o of a life that was once full of faith
    • but is now just a hollow shadow
      • of what it once was.
  o It represents the greatest tragedy of the ages.
• Lives that were molded
  o for some greater undertaking,
    • hearts that were called
      • or a higher purpose,
    • people that somehow
      • got sidetracked along the way
        • and now lie shipwrecked
          • in the oceans of life.
  o Shipwrecked Faith conjures the image
    • of unfulfilled potential,
      • of faith that died
        • a premature death.
          • What a tragedy!

• The question that haunts my mind,
  o as I think about the tragedy
    • of shipwrecked faith
      • is a simple one.
• How does one shipwreck their faith?
  o Paul says that they did it
• by rejecting a good conscience.

• Ships were built to be the master of the seas.
  o Barring some flaw in the workmanship,
    ▪ they aren’t very fragile
    • or easily capsized.
  o As a matter of fact,
    ▪ in most cases one has to ignore
      • some critical realities
        o in order to wreck
          ▪ one of those mighty vessels.
  ▪ Somewhere in the makings
    • of the tragedy of a shipwreck
      o are the sailors who failed
        ▪ to close the gun ports,
      o or the navigator who ignored
        ▪ the depth readings.
  ▪ Somebody failed to heed the warning signs
    • and sailed their vessel
      o into treacherous waters.

• The sinking of the Titanic was, no doubt,
  o the greatest of all maritime tragedies,
    ▪ at least in modern times.
• But the horror of the loss of life
  o is compounded by the fact
    ▪ that it was an avoidable accident.
  o On the day that she sank,
    ▪ the Titanic received wireless messages
      • all day long,
    ▪ warning of floating icebergs,
      • particularly in the region
        o into which she was sailing.
• The first warning was received
  o at 9 a.m. that morning
    ▪ and others followed all through the day.
    • But they were ignored.
• After dark that evening
  o the warnings continued to come in
    ▪ but they had become so common place
      • to the telegram operator
    ▪ that they were not even passed on
      • to the officers of the ship.
  o Finally, at 11.40 p.m.,
almost 15 hours after the first warning was received,
- the imminent danger was realized
  - as lookouts startled the officers
    - with the alarming cry:
      - "Iceberg dead ahead!"
- What followed was a terrible tragedy
  - and a great loss of life
    - that was completely avoidable.
  - In order for the Titanic to sink,
    - all the warnings had to be ignored.
    - As a matter of fact,
      - they became so calloused to the warning
        - that they were no longer
        - even recognized anymore!

Conscience
- The same is true for those
  - that shipwreck their faith.
- Faith is shipwrecked
  - when a good conscience is ignored.
- Faith is shipwrecked
  - when an individual ignores the warning signs
    - and chooses to proceed
      - through treacherous waters.
- God has equipped
  - every man, woman and child
    - with a moral compass.
  - We each have an inborn sense
    - of right and wrong.
  - It is something that all of humanity
    - holds in common.
      - It’s wrong to lie in every culture,
        - its wrong to cheat,
        - to steal
        - and to kill in every society.
  - This sense of right and wrong
    - is built into the experience of humanity,
      - even in the experience of sinful, fallen man,
        - there exist a level of conscience.
  - In the Old Testament, Adam and Eve
    - hid themselves from God
      - in shame because their consciences
        - passed moral judgment
          - on their disobedience.
    - Even in sin, they recognized
that what they had done was wrong.

- The conscience alone
  - is not enough to save a man
    - or even correct the course of a man
  - because it has been perverted
    - by the fallen sinful nature of man.

- However, when God filled you with the Holy Ghost,
  - he renewed within you
    - a good conscience.
  - One of the benefits of having
    - the Spirit of God living in your life
  - is that awareness of what it is
    - to be in right standing with God.

- According to Proverbs 20:27,
  - “The spirit of man is the lamp of the LORD,
    - searching all his innermost parts.”
  - That lamp of the Lord shines in our lives,
    - through the Holy Ghost
      - and reveals to us things
        - in our character
        - and our day to day living
          - that are not pleasing to God.
  - That’s the power of conscience,
    - it searches our thoughts and intentions,
    - it perceives our motives
      - and knows our feelings
        - and it shines a light of truth,
      - revealing to the inner man
        - the true condition of things.

- It is entirely possible
  - to maintain an appearance
    - of holiness and righteousness on the outside
      - but have a heart
        - that is filled with sin.

- You can fool those that look on
  - from the outside.
    - But you can’t fool yourself
      - and you can’t fool your conscience.

- Your conscience is always going to be there with you,
  - a constant reminder that you know
    - the difference between right and wrong.
  - In order to shipwreck your faith, Paul said,
    - you’ve got to ignore that innate sense
• of right and wrong
  o that God has placed in your heart.
  o In order to shipwreck your faith
    ▪ you’ve got to turn a deaf ear
    ▪ to that small still voice of warning
      o that speaks to your heart.
  ▪ That’s the real tragedy of shipwrecked faith
    • -- it isn't accidental.
• No one intended to end up shipwrecked
  o but the master of the vessel
    ▪ ignored all warnings
      ▪ andrecklessly ventured into waters
        o that were known to be dangerous.
• Paul said that,
  o in the process of making
    ▪ shipwreck of their faith,
      ▪ some have “put away” a good conscience.
• The Greek word that is translated
  o by the KJV as “put away”
    ▪ conveys the strong meaning
      ▪ of “to thrust away” or “reject”.
• It involves a deliberate
  o active
    ▪ forceful
      ▪ ignoring of the conscience.
  o It literally means to “push it away”
    ▪ or forcibly reject it.
• I feel impressed of the Holy Ghost today to tell you
  o that in order to shipwreck your faith
    ▪ you will have to force your way past
      ▪ the good conscience that God
        o has placed inside of you.
  o The Holy Ghost isn't going to let you go
    ▪ without a fight.
      ▪ You aren't going to accidentally
        o stumble into shipwreck.
• If you shipwreck your faith
  o it will be because you ignored the warnings
    ▪ that your heart broadcast to you.
  o It will be because you rejected
    ▪ the pleading of a good conscience.
• It’s a dangerous thing
  o to ignore your conscience,
because the more you ignore it,
  • the more comfortable you become
    o about ignoring it.

Understand this,
  • sin will never enter your life
    • without setting off the alarm system
      o of your conscience.

However, if you ignore your conscience
  • and entertain sin,
    • over time, the conscience becomes desensitized.

Just a few chapters later,
  • in 1 Timothy 4:2,
    • Paul speaks of those who have
      • their conscience seared.
  • The word “seared” means “cauterized.
    • When you burn flesh, it scars over
      • and the burned area loses its sensitivity.
    • Nerves that were damaged by the burn
      • are covered over by the scar tissue
        o and the whole area loses the ability to feel.
  • This is the danger of rejecting your conscience.
    • Over time it becomes hard
      • and without feeling.

Listen to this preacher this morning.
  • Don’t let yourself get in the habit
    • of ignoring your conscience.
  • What seems like a small thing at the beginning,
    • results in a large thing in the end.

God gave you a conscience for a reason.
  • It is there to protect you.

When you ignore it and reject it,
  • you place yourself on the route to shipwreck.

Like the Titanic,
  • you willfully sail into waters
    • that can damage your soul.
  • Over time, if you aren’t careful,
    • the final warning will come
      • and your conscience
        o will capitulate to your carnal desires.
    • This is the way to spiritual shipwreck.

When you reject your conscience
  • You open the door to sin
    • In your life.
Sin

- Your conscience is there to warn you
  - in matters pertaining
    - to sin and salvation.

- When you ignore your conscience
  - you do it at the peril of your soul
    - because the things
      - that you allow into your life
        - at the expense of your conscience
          - will always be sin.

- When it comes to shipwrecked faith,
  - sin is the offensive obstacle
    - that strikes a life below the waterline
      - and results in shipwrecked faith.
  - You can’t afford to give place
    - to sin in your life.
  - You can’t afford to play around with it.
    - You can’t afford to entertain it
      - Inevitably, if you flirt with sin,
        - it will sink you.
  - If you ignore the warnings of your heart,
    - if you press on beyond
      - the comfort of your convictions,
        - sin will devastate your faith.

- And, when it is finished
  - it will leave behind
    - the sad tragic evidence of a shipwreck,
      - that empty shell of lost potential
        - and forgotten dreams.

- We’ve all seen them.
  - Those men and women
    - who were once great vessels of God
      - but now have fallen by the wayside
        - and are characterized by a life of sin.

- We’ve each asked ourselves,
  - at some time or another,
    - “What went wrong?”
      - Where did they miss it?
    - How did they end up in such a pitiful state?

- Let me answer that question for you today.
  - It started with a small
    - seemingly insignificant decision
      - to ignore their conscience.
Of Shipwrecks and Sin

It started when they pushed away
  • the conviction of a good conscience
    o and ignored the still small voice of truth
      o that spoke from their hearts.
  • They weren’t overtaken by some huge sin,
    o at least not at first.
  • Instead they were enticed
    • to ignore their conscience,
      o until they so seared their conscience
        • that their carnal desires
          o overwhelmed their sense
            o of right and wrong.
    • That, my friend, is how you shipwreck your faith.

You need to thank God this morning
  o for your conscience.
You need to thank God
  o for the voice of conviction
    • that speaks from your heart.
And some of us likely need to repent to God
  o for the times that we’ve ignored our conscience.

You need to let your spiritual eyes
  o be opened to-day
    • so you can see the damage that is done
      • every time you override your conscience.
  o I know you’ve got the Holy Ghost.
    • I know you are in church.
      • I know you are faithful.
But we each experience times and places
  o on a day-to-day basis,
    • where it is absolutely critical
      • that we allow our conscience to guide us.
  o And, if you are honest with yourself today,
    • it is likely that you can think
      • of times and places
        o where you’ve ignored your conscience
          • and done some things
            • that you knew in your heart
              o weren’t right.
Sure you rationalized it,
  o sure you convinced yourself
    • that this one time would be OK.
  o But in your heart of hearts,
you knew you were violating
• your conscience.

• I want to sound a warning today.
  • It’s a dangerous thing
    • to reject a good conscience.
  • It’s the one thing
    • that puts you on the path
      • to spiritual shipwreck!

Restoration
• Believe it or not,
  • shipwreck doesn’t have to be
    • the end of the story.
• After 333 years in the deep,
  • the Vasa was lifted from her watery grave.

• Because of the very unique conditions
  • of the water where she came to rest,
    • the Vasa was,
      • against all odds,
    • preserved by the very water
      • that had claimed her.
  • Instead of rotting,
    • the old timbers of oak heartwood
      • were largely protected.
  • It took 6 years to raise her
    • from the ocean floor
      • and bring her to dry dock
    • and 30 years of intense restoration efforts
      • before she was final opened as a museum
        • to the general public in 1990.
  • Restoration, on a vessel of her age and magnitude
    • is a constant, continual thing,
      • yet thousands of visitors walk her decks each year.

• Very few ships are as fortunate as the Vasa,
  • very few find life again
    • after the watery grave of shipwreck.
  • But the Vasa will stand
    • as a testimony through all of time
      • that shipwreck doesn’t have to be
        • the end of the story.

• In the case of shipwrecked faith,
• just as in the story of the Vasa,
  ▪ there exists a hope of restoration.
• There is an answer for sin.
  o Paul declared a few verses later
    ▪ that Christ Jesus gave himself a ransom for all.
  o There is hope today
    ▪ for hurting hearts
      ▪ and shipwrecked faith.
  o There is hope today
    ▪ for those that have violated
      ▪ their conscience.
• Jesus, by his own blood,
  o has made a way,
    ▪ where there seemed to be no way.
  o He has made a way
    ▪ that faith can be restored,
      ▪ a way that hearts
        ▪ can be made brand new,
      ▪ and a way that the conscience
        ▪ can be renewed.
    ▪ I come to tell you today
      ▪ that you don’t have to end up shipwrecked.
• You can restore your conscience
  o and renew a right heart
    ▪ by the simple act of repentance.
  o Each of us must learn
    ▪ to value the power of repentance.
      ▪ Genuine, heartfelt repentance
        ▪ lifts the heart into the presence of God
      ▪ and cries out
        ▪ “Create in me a clean heart, O God,
          ▪ and renew a right spirit within me...”
  o Each of us, on a regular basis,
    ▪ needs to find that place in prayer
      ▪ where we experience a renewal of the conscience.

Close
• Sin may result in shipwreck,
  o but the real message today
    ▪ is that mercy can lead
      ▪ to the restoration of the soul.
• There is still hope to be found in redemption.
  o By the grace of God,
    ▪ even shipwrecked faith can sail again...