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CAPTAIN PHILLIPS: LESSONS IN SURVIVAL

We can learn spiritual lessons of survival from a Somali pirate attack on a ship five years ago.

By Gregory Dullum

Five years ago, on Monday, April 6, 2009, an enormous unarmed container ship *Maersk Alabama* (a Danish ship sailing under a U.S. flag), left Yemen on the Saudi Arabian peninsula and headed around the horn of Africa to Mombasa. The *Maersk Alabama* had to sail past Somalia, known for its pirates who hijacked ships and held them for ransom. It had been more than 200 years since a pirate had boarded a U.S. ship. History was about to change.

First Pirate Attack

At 1 p.m. Tuesday, April 7, Captain Richard Phillips scheduled a “fire and boat” drill. This was followed by a man overboard exercise. At 1:40, Phillips was alone on the bridge when he noticed three blips on the radar screen. Three boats were 7 miles behind him on his port quarter, moving fast toward him.

Phillips ordered more speed and called the chief engineer: “Chief, I need you in the engine room now, I’m increasing speed.” Phillips recalls, “I wanted Mike down there to watch the engine computer and let me know if any of the indicators—engine load, exhaust temperatures, cylinder temperatures—veered into the red. The last thing you want to do is kill your power plant when the bad guys are on your tail” (*A Captain’s Duty* by Richard Phillips, 2010, p. 79).

By 3 p.m. the man overboard drill was completed. Phillips realized the pirates had been chasing him for more than an hour. They were 3 miles away and still gaining. Using binoculars, Phillips spotted four men in the lead boat with long black objects in their hands. He was sure they were automatic rifles.

Knowing that pirates often monitored radio frequencies of ships, Phillips got on the radio and pretended to be in contact with a Navy destroyer. He requested assistance and changed his voice to

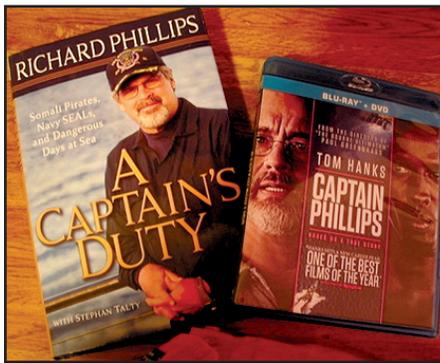


photo by Gregory Dullum

Captain Phillips is a Hollywood movie released last month on DVD and Blu-ray. Starring Tom Hanks, it’s the true story of Captain Richard Phillips, whose large container ship was hijacked by Somali pirates off the coast of Eastern Africa five years ago. The movie is based upon Phillips’ 2010 book, *A Captain’s Duty*.

report that a helicopter gunship was in the air and would arrive in five minutes. The ruse worked. First the mother ship disappeared off the radar screen. Then the smaller skiffs, called fast boats, began to peel off until only one kept up the chase. Phillips knew it took only one skiff with armed pirates to take over a ship!

The ocean helped Phillips by creating large swells. Every time the pirates crashed into a swell, it slowed them down. The swells had been 4 feet high and grew to 6 feet. When the skiff was less than a mile from the *Maersk Alabama*, it finally peeled off and headed away.

Writes Phillips: “It was like being chased by a car full of thugs on the highway and watching them run out of gas.” He added, “The pirates had made a classic mistake. The mother ship had dropped the fast boats into the water too far away, and the flimsy little craft had been unable to negotiate the high seas. I didn’t want to think what would have happened if the water had been smooth” (Phillips, p. 83).

Captain Phillips was happy about the way things had gone. “What was it that Winston Churchill said about there being nothing more exhilarating than being shot at and escaping unhurt? The same goes for beating a pirate attack.

“I felt elated. I felt I had done my job as captain. We’d been vigilant, spotting the pirates at the edge of our visibility range, and we’d ramped up our speed in time to outrun them. The toughest part of defeating a pirate team is detecting them, and seeing them while there’s still time to react. We’d passed that key test” (p. 84).

As a Christian, we don’t have pirates after us, but we do have Satan (1 Pet. 5:8). One of the keys to overcoming Satan’s temptation is to spot it early and FLEE from it at high speed (1 Cor. 6:18, 10:14; 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22).

Pirates Attack Again

On Wednesday morning, April 8, the pirates approached the *Maersk Alabama* again. Through the morning haze, a crew member spotted the white skiff about three miles astern. Writes Phillips, “I looked at the water. The winds had dropped down since yesterday, and the seas were calm. We weren’t going to get lucky again. We were in a race with a much faster boat and the waves weren’t going to stop them today” (Phillips, p. 106).

Having no guns on board, the crew of the *Maersk Alabama* did what it could to protect the ship. Alarms sounded, mustering the crew to their emergency stations. Fire hoses around the ship were turned on, sending powerful streams of water out into the ocean. At 100 pounds per square inch, the force of the spray could knock a man down. Emergency flares were fired at the pirates. In spite of these efforts, they kept coming.

CAPTAIN PHILLIPS

Continued on Page 2

Captain Phillips

Continued from Page 1

The crew took positions throughout the ship. Phillips and his third mate, Colin Wright, manned the bridge. The crew mustered in the safe room, the engineers in the engine room, the first and third engineer in the aft steering room, where they could steer the ship if the bridge were to be breached.

Phillips ordered the ship to take a zig-zag course, making it harder for the skiff to come alongside. Phillips watched as the pirates lifted a long, white ladder into the air which appeared to be custom-made to fit his ship. Before long, the pirates attached the ladder over the side of his ship and began to climb aboard.

Phillips remained on the bridge. He later called that his first mistake. "I didn't want to give up my ship.... I'm not giving up the bridge to anyone. There's something about the bridge that's special to a captain: It symbolizes your control of the ship.... You don't want to hand it over unless you absolutely have to.

"It was what I call my first mistake. I should have begun to retreat right then. But I thought I still had time. I wanted to be in control for as long as I could...." (Phillips, p. 113).

It was only a matter of minutes before the pirates shot their way through the lock on the door to the bridge and entered.

Phillips recalls what happened next: "Relax, Captain, relax," the pirate yelled at me. He was short, thin, and wiry. His face was tense. 'Business, just business. Stop the ship, stop the ship.'

"I was so shocked I couldn't answer. I couldn't believe he had gotten up so fast. He'd gone through the piracy cages (locked gates on stairways) like they were child's play.

"It was 7:35 a.m. The pirates had taken about five minutes to board my ship and take the bridge" (Phillips, p. 115).

On Board the *Maersk Alabama*

Phillips had a portable radio in his hand. Turning his back to the pirate, he pressed the key and said in a low voice, "Bridge is compromised. Bridge is compromised. Pirates on the bridge. Take the steering." This let the first engineer in the aft steering room know the pirates were in control, and to take over steering from the bridge. Then, when Phillips tried to stop the ship from the bridge, his controls had no effect. He convinced the pirates that he tried to stop the ship too quickly, and now the ship was BROKEN (Phillips, pp. 115-117). He noted in his book, "But it's a fine line between deceiving your captors and getting a bullet

in your forehead" (Phillips, p. 126).

The crew cut the power. The inside of the ship went dark and became intensely hot under the African sun. Two of the four pirates took Phillips with them to search for the crew.

Writes Phillips, "The crew and I were keeping one another safe at this point. I was alerting them to the pirates' movements, and they were keeping a wild card in our hands by staying hidden" (p. 142).

As Christians, we must *work together* to keep each other safe and fight off the enemy (Eph. 4:12-16, 1 Cor. 12:25-27, Rom 15:1-2). We are to encourage one another (1 Thes. 4:18). That's one reason fellowship in church is so important (Heb. 10:24-25).

During the search, Phillips could have escaped at any time. He writes, "But the thought never really crossed my mind. Three of my men were in imminent danger. I couldn't leave them to the pirates. It didn't solve anything. Besides, it's just not possible to do something like that and remain the same person you were before. I wanted to be able to look myself—and the crew members' families—in the eye after all this was over and say, 'I did my duty as a captain'" (Phillips, p. 143).

When the pirate leader wanted to search the ship again, Phillips refused to go along, claiming he was too tired. He suggested the leader take Third Mate Wright with him. As the two passed by, Phillips whispered to Wright, "He's not armed. Take him to the guys." Phillips could feel the tables turn just a bit. As he later wrote, "It was our turn to take a hostage" (Phillips, p. 145).

Hostage Exchange

Once the crew held the pirate leader hostage, a deal was brokered between the crew and the other three pirates. Phillips was not involved in the negotiations because he was too busy getting the Somalis ready to leave. The pirates planned to take \$30,000 from the ship's safe and leave in the MOB, a small, open boat used to rescue a MAN OVERBOARD. "They agreed that the crew would give up the Leader, and the pirates would hand me over at the same time," Phillips writes (pp. 154-155).

Things did not proceed as hoped. Phillips needed to be on board the MOB to lower it into the water. "I lowered the MOB to the water with myself and the three pirates in it. The davit put us down with a nice touch. I looked up at the ship. Suddenly, it looked like an ocean liner. Just huge" (Phillips, p. 167).

The batteries were dead and the motor wouldn't start. So a huge, enclosed orange lifeboat was dropped into the ocean and the pirates transferred their equipment and

themselves to the new craft. After having Phillips show them how to operate the lifeboat, the pirates drove away from the *Maersk Alabama*, taking Phillips as a hostage. The \$30,000 was chicken feed to these pirates. If they couldn't get millions of dollars in ransom for the return of the *Maersk Alabama*, they figured they could score a big ransom for its captain.

Phillips realized he had made a mistake in agreeing to the hostage exchange. "I wasn't surprised by the double-cross. I still felt ahead of the game. I'd solved three of my four problems: my crew, ship, and cargo were safe. And I was depending on my luck and my tenacity to save myself" (Phillips, p. 175).

It is a captain's duty to put his crew, ship and cargo ahead of his own life. Phillips explains it this way, "My motto became 'We are all here for the ship. The ship isn't here for us.' That really served me, because it's true. When you're out of port, the ship is your mother, your temporary country, your tribe. And there was an unspoken part of the saying that I kept to myself: 'The captain is here for the crew.' ...

"When you walk onto a ship as the captain, you get the good room, the good hours, the good pay. But you have to accept everything that goes with them. And that includes putting your crew's lives ahead of your own" (Phillips, pp. 90-91).

As Christians, we are to put others, particularly the brethren, ahead of ourselves, even to the point of being willing to die for them (Gal. 6:10, Philip. 2:3-8, John 15:12-13).

The Navy Arrives

Phillips fell asleep that night and awoke about 2 a.m. Thursday morning. "I looked out and saw one of the most beautiful sights I'd ever seen in my life: an Ameri-

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can navy ship steaming toward us at thirty knots, bright lights shining from the deck, sirens wailing and loudspeaker blaring. The spotlight was so intense it lit up the inside of the lifeboat like it was a movie set.

“‘Shut off the light, shut off the light.’ the leader was screaming into the radio. ‘No action, no military action.’”

“My countrymen had arrived. I felt my spirits lift” (Phillips, p. 179).

As Christians going through trials, we have our spirits lifted by cards, letters and phone calls from our brethren (Prov. 25:25). We know we are NOT ALONE in our trials; *our countrymen have arrived*.

The *USS Bainbridge* stopped nearby and delivered hand-held radios, batteries, water and chocolate Pop Tarts to the lifeboat. But no rescue was forthcoming.

Attempting an Escape

Phillips recalled, “I was starting to get frustrated, because I hadn’t had a chance to escape. I was getting mad and thinking to myself: *Don’t be a wimp, if you see a chance to get out, you have to take it.*”

“I also prayed, ‘God, give me the strength and patience to see my chance and take it. I know I’m going to get only one shot. Give me the wisdom to know it.’ I never prayed to get away, I just prayed for the strength and patience and knowledge to know when to make my move. I believe God helps those who help themselves. Asking Him to do all the work is just not my style.

“But nothing helped my chances of escape. There wasn’t a single instant when I wasn’t under the Somalis’ watchful eyes. I began to wonder if I’d ever get my chance” (Phillips, pp. 190-191).

In the blackness of early Friday morning, Phillips saw his chance to escape. Three of the pirates were asleep and the fourth went through the back hatch, put down his automatic rifle and stood relieving himself into the ocean. Phillips moved quickly, pushed the pirate into water and jumped in himself.

The screams of the pirate in the water woke the others. They started the engine and began circling, looking for Phillips with their guns pointed at the water.

The moon was full and Phillips could not hide as he swam toward the Navy destroyer, half a mile away. The lifeboat pursued him and stopped right on top of him as he swam under water. There was no way to escape and Phillips was brought back on board. He was tied to a horizontal bar on the canopy and beaten.

Death Threats

Phillips recalls the beating: “They were spitting mad, stomping on the deck, spittle

flying as they abused me. But they were thin guys and they didn’t have a huge amount of power behind their blows. Honestly, my sister Patty hits harder. I could feel my face and my ribs getting bruised up but I knew I could survive that. What really worried me was the gun. Young Guy was whacking me with it in the knee and every time he did, the muzzle would pass by my torso. *He’s trying to beat me, I thought, but he’s going to shoot me instead.*”

“‘We kill you now! Kill you!’ They were like angry bees” (Phillips, pp. 205-206).

The mood changed in the cramped quarters of the lifeboat. “That was the end of any joviality on their part....”

“Their attitudes toward me changed completely in that instant. I’d been their hostage before, but I’d been a human being. I’d joked with Musso and Tall Guy and I’d even had some fun with Young Guy. Now that was broken. They looked at me like I was an animal, a thing.

“As I sat trying to catch my breath, I thought, *Either I’m getting out of here alive or they are. But not both.*”

The pirates began firing their unloaded guns at Phillips. The first time it happened, Phillips guessed there was no clip in the rifle. “Still, hearing a gun fire while it’s pointed at your gut is a nervous feeling. I twitched the first few times” (Phillips, pp. 206-208).

Phillips reflected on his situation. “I thought about how different this was from the ship. That had been a battle of nerves and wits. Like chess. The crew and I won because we’d prepared to win, because we’d been ready for the unimaginable. And because we knew the ship and its systems. We’d outsmarted the [pirates].”

“But that wasn’t going to work on this lifeboat. This was something rawer. It was a battle of wills. The pirates were constantly trying to wear me down, to confuse me, to humiliate me, to turn me into a child instead of a man. I was trying to persevere. To prevail....”

“The real obstacle wasn’t the Somalis, I told myself. It was fear. Every time I pushed through it, I found that I could persevere. *This isn’t over until you say it’s over, I said to myself. I’m not going to give up. I will outlast these guys*” (pp. 232, 239).

Bangbangbangbangbang

After three nights and two days on the lifeboat, two more Navy ships appeared: the *USS Boxer* and *USS Arleigh Burke*.

Saturday passed and nothing happened. There was no rescue. Phillips heard some shots but couldn’t tell who was firing. Then he saw the pirates had opened a

hatch and were firing at a Navy ship.

On Sunday evening, after another unbearable day in the lifeboat, Phillips was exhausted. He slid down to the floor of the lifeboat to rest.

“All of a sudden, shots rang out. *Bangbangbangbangbang*. It sounded like six or seven in a row. As the noise echoed in the tiny boat, I dove into the row of seats, getting as low as I could. I felt something raining down on my face, jabbing my skin. *What now? I thought. What just happened?...*”

“‘What are you doing?’ I shouted. ‘What are you guys doing?’”

“I thought the pirates were shooting one another and I was caught in the crossfire. They’d been arguing and it had escalated to gunfire. And now, after days of heat, punishment, and threats, there was complete silence” (pp. 261-262).

The pirates had all been killed by Navy SEAL sharpshooters. A SEAL opened a hatch and brought Phillips to safety.

Ultimately, we as Christians cannot save ourselves, either physically or spiritually. Our rescue will come from Jesus Christ (Acts 4:10-12, Mat. 24:21-22, Rev. 19:11-20:3).

Lessons Phillips Learned

Reflecting on the experience, Phillips writes, “What kept me alive was mental toughness. I just refused to let the pirates beat me.... You have to train your mind to never give up.

“The thing I saw the clearest was the lesson I learned on the lifeboat: we are stronger than we think we are. There were so many times during my ordeal that I was afraid I didn’t have what it takes to get through the next five minutes. Especially during the mock executions. The ultimate fear, of watching yourself die, was so terrifying that I thought I would collapse into a jibbering mess. But I never did. It taught me that I could handle far more than I’d given myself credit for.

“We all set our endurance levels low, out of fear we will fail. We think, *So long as I have this job, or this house, or this partner, or this amount of money, I’ll be okay.* But what happens when those things are taken away from you? And more—your freedom, your dignity, even those things we take for granted, like your ability to use the bathroom? What happens when people try to take away even your life? You find that you are a larger and a stronger personality than you ever imagined you were. That your

JOHN THE DISCIPLE WHOM JESUS LOVED

John helps baptize 3,000 people, preaches and performs miracles with the others, and gets arrested twice.

By Gregory Dullum
Part 18

Baptizing 3,000 People

Peter's inspired sermon on the day of Pentecost, A.D. 31, caused about 3,000 people to become baptized in one day (Acts 2:37-41)!

John undoubtedly helped in baptizing these people. If the 12 apostles did all the baptizing themselves, they each had 250 to baptize in one day. If they baptized for 12 hours, that means they each baptized 20 per hour, or about one baptism every three minutes.

Those baptized did NOT have water sprinkled on their foreheads. They were totally submersed in water. We know this, because baptism pictures a burial of "the old man," and no one BURIES someone by sprinkling dirt on their foreheads (Rom. 6:1-6). Also, Jesus (who really didn't need to be baptized because He was sinless) left an example for us. He was submersed in the water by John the Baptist. The Bible tells us, "Then Jesus, when He had been baptized, CAME UP immediately *from the water*" (Mat. 3:13, emphasis added).

John probably noticed a change coming over the other apostles and himself after receiving the holy spirit on Pentecost. They all seemed to lose their timidity about living and preaching God's way of life. There was a focused power behind everything they did. John realized a truth that Paul later expressed to Timothy, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7).

When sick and lame people came to the apostles, the apostles laid hands on them and healed them *instantly*, just as when people had come to Jesus for healing. *Many miracles* were performed by John and the other apostles (Acts 2:43). These miracles caused more and more people to seek them out and become members of the church (v. 47).

When the church first began, it was not simply a two-hour Sabbath service once a week. They gathered daily in the temple: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread (meals) and in prayers.... So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food

with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (vv. 42, 46-47).

Sharing Things in Common

Thousands of converts came from all walks of life and from all over the Roman Empire (Acts 2:5, 8-11). There were rich and poor, landowners and slaves who became part of the church. Some of the converts lived in Jerusalem and the surrounding towns, but many had traveled from other areas.

Even the apostles had homes in Galilee. They (and the other brethren) realized they no longer needed their homes in far-away lands. The apostles would be *fishermen* no more! Being *fishers of men*, they would be headquartered *in Jerusalem* and would make treks to other parts of the world to preach the Gospel (Acts 1:8). The apostles and the others decided to sell their possessions which were no longer needed, and pool their resources to take care of the poor and needy, and to finance the beginning of the church (Acts 2:44-45).

Healing a Lame Man

Peter and John had a *special working relationship*. Early on, they did several things TOGETHER.

"Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms.

"And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, 'Look at us.' So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them.

"Then Peter said, 'Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.' And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.

"So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God. And all

the people saw him walking and praising God. Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him" (Acts 3:1-10).

John listened as Peter used this opportunity to preach his second recorded sermon. Because of this sermon, many more became Christians: "However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of men came to be about five thousand" (Acts 4:4).

John and Peter Arrested

Not everyone who heard Peter and John preaching was happy with their message!

"Now as they spoke to the people [notice it was not just Peter, but John also spoke], the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening....

"And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, 'By what power or by what name have you done this?' " (Acts 4:1-3, 5-7).

Peter no longer was the fear-stricken denier of his Savior! He didn't try to side-step the question or worm his way out of the situation. Why was he so BOLD *now* and NOT *at the crucifixion*? Because NOW he was *filled with the power of God!* "The Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them..." (v. 8).

Peter told these Jewish leaders *in no uncertain terms* that the lame man was healed by the power of Jesus Christ whom THEY *had crucified* and was raised from the dead. He added a very important truth: salvation can only come through belief in Christ and obedience to his teachings! NO OTHER RELIGION, including their Jewish religion, opens the door to eternal life! He said, "for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (v. 12).

John was NOT SILENT at this time. He also spoke BOLDLY before these Jewish

leaders.

“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized they had been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it” (vv. 13-14).

The council commanded John, Peter and the lame man to wait outside the room while they deliberated about what to do with them (vv. 15-17).

When they were called back into the council chamber, John and Peter heard the verdict: “And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus” (v. 18).

John and Peter did NOT submit to their demands. There was a *higher authority* than the Jewish leaders to whom they must answer. They replied respectfully, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you be the judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (v. 20).

This angered the Jewish leaders, and they wanted to punish John and Peter, but they were afraid to lay hands on them because of the crowd watching the proceedings. The crowd glorified God for what had been done. So the Jewish leaders further threatened John and Peter and let them go (v. 21).

Being released, John and Peter reported to the other apostles what had happened and the threats that had been made against them. Did they DARE to keep on preaching Jesus in the face of these threats from the Jewish leadership?

The Apostles Pray

The other apostles, after hearing what had happened to John and Peter, took the matter to God. They considered this persecution to be a fulfillment of David’s words in Ps. 2:1-2: “Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things?” They applied David’s words to their situation and then asked God, “Now Lord, look on their threats, and grant to your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus” (Acts 4:24-30).

As the prayer ended, *John felt the building SHAKE*. He felt a calm BOLDNESS come over him as all in the room were *filled with God’s spirit*. They all began speaking BOLDLY together. John knew at that moment that the Jewish threats were NOT going to stop their preaching. The work of the church would *go forward* with CONFIDENCE that it was backed by Almighty God!

Lying, Corruption Enter Church

The early church members were filled with love for each other. Yet, before too long, lying and corruption entered the church. As with everything else *in the beginning of his church*, God took care of this matter in a big, *supernatural way*. He struck dead the two liars, Ananias and his wife, Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10)!

When John and the other church members heard of this incident, it caused their hearts to fear: “So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things” (Acts 5:11). This is the *first time* the word “church” appears in the book of Acts.

Apostles Imprisoned

The apostles continued to perform miracles among the people. Multitudes of people, both men and women, saw the miracles and joined the church. Some in Jerusalem residents laid on beds and couches in the streets, hoping the shadow of Peter might pass over them and cause them to be healed.

Word of these miracles spread to surrounding cities, and crowds came to Jerusalem to be healed by the apostles. None were turned away. ALL WERE HEALED (Acts 5:12-16).

The miracles and preaching about Jesus did not go unnoticed by the Jewish leaders! “Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, and laid hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison” (vv. 17-18).

First, it had been John and Peter who were arrested by the Jewish leaders. This time, John and Peter were accompanied by *the other 10 apostles*. The ENTIRE LEADERSHIP of the church was in jail!

JESUS would NOT allow the entire top management team of HIS church to be lopped off! He acted *miraculously* to restore their freedom!

While John and the others sat behind bars that night, wondering what would happen, a stranger approached their prison cell and opened the door. “Follow me,” he said, and led all 12 out of the prison. Seeing that no Roman soldier stopped them, the apostles realized this stranger was an angel.

The angel told them, “Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.” It was very early in the morning, and the apostles all went to the temple and taught. Meanwhile, the Jewish Sanhedrin gathered in its council chambers and sent to the prison to have the apostles brought before them.

(To be continued!)

Fun Fact



Drawing and Fun Fact are courtesy of NAPS

Little cakes of salt stamped with the likeness of the emperor were once used as money in China.

Witerature

Wit and wisdom to complement the truths of the Holy Bible can be found in secular writings.

The Advetures of Pinocchio, by Carlo Collodi, The Great Reads, 2005, p. 10.

Obey Parents

“Pinocchio turned and saw a large Cricket crawling slowly up the wall.

“ ‘Tell me, Cricket, who are you?’

“ ‘I am the Talking Cricket and I have been living in this room for more than two hundred years.’

“ ‘Today, however, this room is mine,’ said the Marionette, ‘and if you wish to do me a favor, get out now, and don’t turn around even once.’

“ ‘I refuse to leave this spot,’ answered the Cricket, ‘until I have told you a great truth.’

“ ‘Tell it then, and hurry.’

“ ‘Woe to boys who refuse to obey their parents and run away from home! They will never be happy in this world, and when they are older they will be sorry for it.’ ”

Ex. 20:12, Prov. 4:1-4, Col. 3:20

Quotable Quotes

“It is the greatest of all mistakes to do nothing because you can do only a little. Do what you can.”

—Sydney Smith

Memory Scripture

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” —2 Cor. 5:9

Captain Phillips

Continued from Page 3

strength and your faith don't depend on how secure you are. They're independent of those things.

"'You could do what I did,' I tell people. 'You just haven't had to yet.' And they always say, 'Well, I don't know about that.' I do. Believe me. Every time I doubted myself, I came through it. Every time something was stripped away from me, I found I didn't really need it. We are stronger than we think" (pp. 283-284).

Difficult Days Ahead

Very difficult times lie ahead for the whole world. (Mat. 24:21-22). We won't be facing Somali pirates. There will be other enemies just as real, who will want us dead. Jesus tells us: "people will arrest you and treat you cruelly. They will judge you in their synagogues and put you in jail and force you to stand before kings and governors, because you follow me. But this will give you an opportunity to tell about me. Make up your minds not to worry ahead of time about what you will say. I will give you the wisdom to say things that none of your enemies will be able to stand against or prove wrong. Even your parents, brothers, relatives, and friends will turn against you because you follow me. But none of these things can really harm you. By continuing to have faith you will save your lives" (Luke 21:12-19 NCV).

We don't know how much persecution we will have to endure. Some of God's church will be taken to a place of safety (Rev. 3:10, 12:14). They will miss the worst part of the tribulation, but they may suffer *some* persecution *before they flee*. Another part of God's church will have to endure this difficult time outside of the place of safety (Rev. 12:17).

However difficult our lives become as we near Christ's return, keep the lessons of Captain Phillips in mind. Never give up! Persevere to the end! Pray for strength and patience. God promises He'll never leave nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5). He'll help us through (Ps. 33:20). Remember, we are stronger than we think we are, and with God's help, we can persevere to the end!

Jesus tells us, "There will be more and more evil in the world, so most people will stop showing love for each other. But those people who keep their faith *until the end* will be *SAVED*" (Mat. 24:12-13 NCV).

If we *endure to the end*, WE WILL BE SAVED!



California Suffers from Severe Drought

"The punishing drought that has swept California is now threatening the state's drinking water supply.

"With no sign of rain, 17 rural communities providing water to 40,000 people are in danger of running out within 60 to 100 days. State officials said that the number was likely to rise in the months ahead after the State Water Project, the main municipal water distribution system, announced on Friday [Jan. 31] that it did not have enough water to supplement the dwindling supplies of local agencies that provide water to an additional 25 million people. It is the first time the project has turned off its spigot in its 54-year history....

"This latest development has underscored the urgency of a drought that has already produced parched fields, starving livestock, and pockets of smog.

"'We are on track for having the worst drought in 500 years,' said B. Lynn Ingram, a professor of earth and planetary sciences at the University of California, Berkeley...

"The snowpack in the Sierra Nevada, which supplies much of California with water during the dry season, was at just 12 percent of normal last week, reflecting the lack of rain or snow in December and January" ("Severe Drought Has U.S. West Fearing Worst" by Adam Nagourney and Ian Lovett, *The New York Times*, www.nytimes.com, Feb. 1, 2014, pp. 1, 4).

God warned his people that if they disobeyed Him, they would experience this kind of drought: "But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:...And your heavens which are over your head shall be bronze, and the earth, which is under your feet shall be iron. The LORD will change the rain of your land to powder and dust; from heaven it shall come down on you until you are destroyed" (Deut. 28:15, 23-24).

Our nation will be destroyed before

Christ returns. Our people will be taken into national captivity for disobeying God (vv. 41, 47-52, 64-68). The remnant of our people will remain in captivity until they are freed by Christ at his return (Isa. 10:20-23, 11:10-12).

The California drought may be linked to homosexuality and other sexual sins rampant in that state. San Francisco has long been the home for homosexual activists. Notice this prophecy *linking DROUGHT to sexual behavior*:

"Lift up your eyes to the desolate heights and see: Where have you not lain with men? By the road you have sat for them like an Arabian in the wilderness; and you have polluted the land with your harlotries and your wickedness. Therefore the showers have been withheld, and there has been no latter rain. You have had a harlot's forehead; you refused to be ashamed" (Jer. 3:2-3).

Gay Marriage Gains Momentum in States

"A sweeping decision on Thursday night [Feb. 13] struck down Virginia's ban on same-sex marriage and continued a remarkable winning streak for gay rights advocates....

"'Rapid changes in public opinion are also playing a part,' said Andrew M. Koppelman, a law professor at Northwestern. 'It is becoming increasingly clear to judges that if they rule against same-sex marriage their grandchildren will regard them as bigots,' he said" ("A Steady Path to Supreme Court as Gay Marriage Gains Momentum in States" by Adam Liptak, *The New York Times*, www.nytimes.com, Feb. 14, 2014, p. 1).

God tells us that homosexual activity is wrong: "If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death" (Lev. 20:13).

As America becomes more accepting of this abominable sin, it becomes more like the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, which God destroyed with fire and brimstone (Gen. 18:16-19:29). We are fast approaching the time of our national demise—not from fire and brimstone—but from national captivity.