

There Go The Ships

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that just as ships are made to sail with purpose and guidance, Christians are called to live actively and dependently on the Spirit, steering their lives toward God's glory amid life's changing circumstances.

Scripture: Psalm 104:26, Jonah 1, Romans 8:28, John 3:8, Philippians 2:13

Topics: "Christian Purpose", "Divine Providence", "Dependence on the Holy Spirit"

Description

In 'There Go The Ships,' C.H. Spurgeon reflects on the Psalmist's observation of ships sailing on the sea, drawing profound spiritual lessons about Christian purpose, dependence on the Holy Spirit, and trust in God's providence. Spurgeon exhorts believers to live actively with a fixed purpose, cooperating with the Spirit's power while navigating life's uncertainties. This devotional sermon challenges listeners to awaken to their divine calling and to steer their lives toward God's glory amid changing circumstances.

Transcript

"There go the ships." Psalm 104:26.

I was walking, the other day, by the side of the sea, looking out upon the English Channel. It so happened that there was a bad wind for the vessels going down the Channel and they were lying in great numbers between the shore and the Goodwins. I should think I counted more than a hundred, all waiting for a change of wind. All of a sudden the wind shifted to a more favorable quarter and it was interesting to see with what rapidity all sails were spread and the vessels began to disappear like birds on the wing. It was a sight such as one might not often see, but worth traveling a hundred miles to gaze upon, to see them all sail like a gallant squadron and disappear southward on their voyages. "There go the ships," was the exclamation that naturally rose to one's lips.

The Psalmist thought it worth his while to pen the fact which he, too, had noticed, though it is very questionable whether David had ever seen anything like the number of vessels which pass our coasts. Certainly he had seen none to be compared with them for tonnage. The first lesson which may be learned from the ships and the sea is this—every part of the earth is made with some design. The land, of course, yields "grass for the cattle and herb for the service of man." But what about the broad acres of the sea? We cannot sow them, nor turn them into pasture. The reaper fills not his arms from the briny furrows! They give neither seed for the sower nor bread for the eater, neither do herds of cattle cover them as they do the thousand hills of earth.

Remorselessly swallowing up all that is cast upon it, the thankless ocean makes no return of fruit or flower. Is not the larger part of the world given up to waste? "No," says David, and so say we—"There go the ships." The sea benefits man by occasioning navigation and yielding, besides, an enormous harvest of fishes of many kinds. Besides which, as the blood is necessary for the body, so it is necessary for this world that there should be upon its surface a vast mass of water in perpetual motion. That measureless gathering together of the waters is an amazing instance of Divine Wisdom in its existence, its perpetual ebb and flow and even in its form and quantity. In the ocean there is not a drop of water too much nor a drop too little! There is not a single mile of sea more than there ought to be, nor less than there should be.

An exact balance and proportion is maintained and we little know how the blooming of the tiny flower or the flourishing of the majestic cedar would be affected were the balance disturbed. Between the tiny drop of dew upon each blade of grass and the boundless main there is a relation and proportion such as only an infinite mind could have arranged. Remember, also, that the ocean's freshness tends to promote life and health among the sons of men. It is good that there is sea, or the land might devour its inhabitants by sickness. God has made nothing in vain. Ignorance gazes on the stormy deep and judges it to be a vast disorder, the mother of confusion and the nurse of storms. But better knowledge teaches us what Revelation had before proclaimed, namely, that in wisdom has the Lord made all things.

But does not the ocean grievously separate lovers and friends? Many a wife thinks of her husband on the far-off Pacific. Many a mother casts an anxious thought towards her sailor boy. And both are half inclined to think it is a mistake to place so vast a portion of the globe as a cruel dividing gulf between loving hearts. Others evidently thought so in years gone by, for among the figurative excellencies of the new earth we are told that there shall be no more sea. But what a mistake it is to think that the sea is a divider—it is the great uniter of the races of men—for, "there go the ships." It is the highway of nations by which they reach each other far more readily than they could have done had no sea existed and arid deserts or towering mountains had intervened.

This is one instance in which we do not understand God's designs, for we judge them upon the surface. As the sea apparently divides, but really unites nations, so often in Providence things look one way, but go another. We say, "All these things are against me," when all things are working together for our good! We judge that to be a curse which, in the deep intent of God, is a rich blessing! And we write that down as among the ills of life which, in God's esteem, is

reckoned to be among its choicest mercies. Judge not according to the sight of the eyes, or the changeful feelings of the heart! But unstaggeringly believe in the Infallible Goodness of our great Father in Heaven!

As the child mistakes God's design in the sea, so will you also mistake His designs in Providence if you set up yourself as the measurer of the infinite—

"Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, But trust Him for His Grace. Behind a frowning Providence He hides a smiling face."

Our subject, however, shall not be the uses of the sea, but this one simple matter—"There go the ships."

I. And, first, WE SEE THAT THE SHIPS GO. "There go the ships." The ships are made to go. The ship is not made to lie forever upon the stocks, or to be shut up in the docks. It is generally looked upon as an old hulk of little service when it has to lie up in ordinary and rot in the river. But a ship is made to go, and, as you see that it goes, remember that you also were made to go. Activity in Christian work is the result and

design of Grace in the soul. How I wish we could launch some of you!

You are, we trust, converted, but you as yet serve but slender uses. Very quiet, sluggish and motionless, you lie on the stocks by the month together, and we have nearly as much trouble to launch you as Brunel had with the "Great Eastern." I have tried hard to knock away your blocks, remove your dogshores, and grease your ways, but you need hydraulic rams to stir you! When will you feel that you must go and learn to "walk the water as a thing of life." O, for a grand launch! Hundreds are lying high and dry and to them I would give the motto, "launch out into the deep." The ships go, when will you go, too?

The ships, in going, at last disappear from view. The vessel flies before the wind and very speedily it is gone—and such is our destiny before long. Our life is gone as the swift ships. We think ourselves stationary, but we are always moving on. As we sit in these pews so quietly, the angel of time is bearing us between his wings at a speed more rapid than we can guess. Every single tick of the clock is but a vibration of his mighty wings and he bears us on, and on, and on, and never stays to rest either by day or night. Swift as the arrow from the bow we are always speeding towards the target. How short time is! How very short our life is! Let each one say, "How short my life is!"

No man knows how near he is to his grave. Perhaps if he could see it, it is just before him. I almost wish he could see it, for a yawning grave might make some men start to reason and to thought. That yawning grave is there, though they perceive it not—

"A point of time, a moments space, May land me in yon heavenly place, Or shut me up in Hell."

"There go the ships," and there go you, also! You are never in one place. You are always flying, swift as the eagle, or, to come back to the text, as the swift ship, yet, "all men think all men mortal but themselves." The oldest man here probably thinks he will outlive some of the younger ones. The man who is soonest to die may be the very man, of us all, who has the least thought of death! And he that is nearest to his departure is, perhaps, the man who least thinks of it. Just as in the ship all were awake and every man praying to his God except Jonah, for whom the storm was raging, so does it often happen that in a congregation every man may be aroused and made to think of his latter end except the one man, the marked man, who will never see tomorrow's sun. As you see the ships, think of your mortality!

The ships, as they go, are going on business. Some few ships go here and there upon pleasure, but for the most part the ships have something serious to do. They have a charter and they are bound for a certain port. And this teaches us how we should go on the voyage of life with a fixed, earnest, weighty purpose. May I ask each one of you, have you something to do, and is it worth doing? You are sailing, but are you sailing like a mere pleasure yacht, whose port is everywhere, which scuds and flies before every fitful wind and is a mere butterfly with no serious work before it? You may be as heavily laden and dingy as a collier, there may be nothing of beauty or swiftness about you, but after all, the main thing is the practical result of your voyage.

Dear Friend, what are you doing? What have you been doing? And what do you contemplate doing? I should like every young man here just to look at himself. Here you are, young man. You certainly were not sent into this world merely to wear a coat and to stand so many feet in your stockings! You must have been sent here with some intention. A

noble creature like man—and man is a noble creature as compared with the animal creation—is surely made for something. What were you made for? Not merely to enjoy yourself. That cannot be! You certainly

are not "a butterfly born in a bower," neither were you made to be creation's blot and blank.

Neither can you have been created to do mischief. It were an evil thing for you to be a mere serpent in the world, to creep in the grass and wound the traveler. No, you must be made for something. What is that something? Are you answering your end? We were made for God's glory. Nothing short of this is worthy of immortal beings! Have we sought that glory? Are we seeking it now? If not, I commend to your consideration this thought, that as the ships go on their business, so ought men to live with a fixed and worthy purpose. I would say this, not only to young men, but with greater earnestness, still, to men who may have wasted 40 years.

O, how could I dare to stand before this congregation tonight and have to say, "Friends, I have had no objective. I have lived in this world for myself, alone. I have had no grand purpose before me"? I should be utterly ashamed if that were the fact. And if any man is obliged to feel that his purpose was such that he dares not acknowledge it, or that he has only existed to make so much money, or gain a position in life, or to enjoy himself, but he has never purposed to serve his God, I would say to him, Wake up, wake up, I pray you, to a noble purpose, worthy of a man! May God, the ever-blessed Spirit, set this before you in the light of eternity and in the light of Jesus' dying love! And may you be awakened to solemn, earnest purpose and pursuit.

"There go the ships," but not idly. They go upon business. These ships, however, whatever their errand is, sail upon a changeful sea. Today the sea is smooth like glass. The ship, however, makes very small headway. Tomorrow there is a breeze which fills out the sail and the ship goes merrily before it. Perhaps, before night comes on, the breeze increases to a gale and then rushes from a gale into a hurricane. Let the mariner see to, it when the storm-winds are out, for the ship needs to be staunch to meet the tempest. Mark how in the tempestuous hour the sea mingles with the clouds and the clouds with the sea. See how the ship mounts up to Heaven on the crest of the wave and then dives into the abyss in the furrow between the enormous billows—until the mariners reel to and fro and stagger like drunken men.

Soon they have weathered the storm and, perhaps, tomorrow it will be calm again. "There go the ships" on an element which is a proverb for fickleness, for we say, "false as the smooth, deceitful sea." "They go," you say, "upon the sea, but I dwell upon the solid earth." Ah, good Sir, there is not much to choose. There is nothing stable beneath yon waxing and waning moon. We say "terra firma," but where, where is terra firma? What man has discovered the immovable rock? Certainly not he who looks to this world for it! He has it not who thinks he has, for many plunge from riches into poverty, from honor to disgrace, from power to servitude.

Who says, "My mountain stands firm, I shall never be moved"? He speaks as the foolish speak! It is a voyage, Sir, and even with Christ on board it is a voyage in which storms will occur! It is a voyage in which you may have to say, "Master, do You not care that we perish?" Expect changes, then. Do not hold anything on earth too firmly. Trust in God and be on the watch, for who knows what may be on the morrow? "There go the ships."

II. But now, having spoken upon that, our second point is, HOW GO THE SHIPS? What makes them go? For there are lessons here for Christians. We leave our steamships out of the question, as they were not known in David's day and, therefore, not intended. But how go the ships? Well, they must go according to the wind. They cannot make headway without favoring gales. And if our port is Heaven, there is no getting there except by the blessed Spirit's blowing upon us. He blows where He wishes and we need that He

should breathe upon us.

We never steer out of the port of destruction upon our venturesome voyage till the heavenly Wind drives us out to sea. And when we are out upon the ocean of spiritual life we make no progress unless we have His favoring breath. We are dependent upon the Spirit of God even more than the mariners upon the breeze. Let us all know this and, therefore, cry—

Celestial Breeze, no longer stay

But fill my sails and speed my way." It is not possible to insist too much on the humbling Truth of God, "Without Me you can do nothing." It helps to check self-confidence and it exalts the Holy Spirit. Unless we honor Him, He will not honor us. Therefore, let us cheerfully acknowledge our absolute dependence upon Him.

But still, the mariner does not go by the wind without exertion on his own part, for the sails must be spread and managed so that the wind may be utilized. One man will go many knots, while another with the same breeze goes but few, for there is a good deal of tacking about needed, sometimes, to use the little wind, or the cross wind which may prevail. Sometimes all the sails must be spread, but at other times only a part. Management is required. If some were spread, they might take the wind out of others, and so the ship might lose instead of gaining. There is a deal of work on board a ship. I believe that some people have a notion that the ship goes of itself and that the sailors have nothing to do but sit down and enjoy themselves. But if you have ever been to sea as an able-bodied seaman, you have discovered that for an easy life you must not be one of a ship's crew!

And so, mark you, we are dependent upon the Spirit of God, but He puts us into motion and action. And if Christian men sit down and say, "Oh, the Spirit of God will do the work," you will find the Spirit of God will do nothing of the sort! The only operation which He will be likely to perform will be to convince you that you are a sluggard and that you will come to poverty. The Spirit of God makes men earnest, fervent, living and intense. He "works in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure." We have sails to manage to catch the favoring breeze and we shall need all the strength we can obtain if we are to make good headway in the voyage of life.

Some professors say, "God will save His own people." I am afraid He will never save them! They expect there will come good times when a great number of the elect will be gathered in, but they fold their arms and do nothing at all to promote the spread of the Gospel. When they see others a little busy, they say, "Ah, mere excitement!" and so on. They tell us God will have His own, to which I generally reply that I believe He will, but I do not believe He will have them, because if they were His own they would not talk in that fashion, for those who are God's own people have a zeal for God and a love for souls.

Do you not remember what God said to David? "When you hear the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees then shall you bestir yourself." Not, "Then shall you sit still and say 'God will do it.'" When David heard the angels coming over the tops of the trees to fight the Philistines—when he heard their soft tread among the leaves, like the rustling of the wind—then he was to bestir himself! And so, when God's Spirit comes to work in the Church, the Christian must bestir himself and not sit still. "There go the ships." They go with the wind, but they are the scene of great industry, or else the wind would whistle through the yards and the ship would make no voyages. Thus, Brothers and Sisters, we see dependence and energy united—faith sweetly showing itself in good works.

"There go the ships." How do they go? Well, they have to be guided and steered by the helm. The helm is a little thing, but yet it rules the vessel. As the helm is turned, so is the vessel guided. Look you well to it, Christian, that your motives and purposes are always right. Your love is the helm of the vessel! Where your affection is, your thoughts and actions tend to be. If you love the world, you will drift with the world! But if the love of the Father is in you, then your vessel will go towards God and towards Divine things! O, see to it that Christ has His hands on the tiller and that He guides you towards the haven of perfect peace!

The ship being guided by the helm, he who manages the helm seeks direction from charts and lights. "There go the ships," but they do not go of themselves, without management and wisdom. Thought is exercised and knowledge and experience. There is an eye on deck which at night looks out for yonder revolving light, or the colored ray of the light of the ship just ahead there. And the thoughtful brain says, "I must steer south-west of such a light," or, "to the north of such a light, or I shall be upon the sands." Besides mere lookouts upon the sea, that anxious eye also busies itself with the chart, scans the stars and takes observations of the moon. The captain's mind is exercised to learn exactly where the vessel is and where she is going, lest the good ship unawares should come to mischief.

And so, dear Brethren, if we are to get to Heaven, we must study well the Scriptures. We must look well to every warning and guiding light of the Spirit's kindling and ask for direction from above, for as the ships go not at haphazard, so neither will any Christian his way to Heaven unless he watches and prays and looks up daily, saying, "Guide me in a plain path, O God." The voyage of a ship on the main ocean seems, to me, to be an admirable picture of the life of faith. The sailor does not see a road before him, or any land mark or sea mark, yet is sure of his course. He relies upon fixed lights in Heaven, for far out he can see no beacon or light on the sea.

His calculations, based on the laws of the heavenly bodies, are sure guides on a wild wilderness where no keel ever leaves a furrow to mark the way. The Late Captain Basil Hall, one of the most scientific officers in the navy, tells the fol-

lowing interesting incident. He once sailed from San Blas, on the west coast of Mexico. After a voyage of 8,000 miles, occupying 89 days, he arrived off Rio de Janeiro, having in this interval passed through the Pacific Ocean, rounded Cape Horn and crossed the South Atlantic without making land or seeing a single sail except an American whaler. When, within a week's sail of Rio, he set seriously about, determining by lunar observations, the position of his ship, and then steered his course by those common principles of navigation which may be safely employed for short distances between one known station and another.

Having arrived within what he considered, from his computations, 15 or 20 miles of the coast, he hove to, at four o'clock in the morning, to await the break of day, and then bore up, proceeding cautiously, on account of a thick fog. As this cleared away, the crew had the satisfaction of seeing the great Sugar Loaf Rock which stands on one side of the harbor's mouth, so nearly right ahead, that they had not to alter their course above a point in order to hit the entrance of the port. This was the first land they had seen for nearly three months, after crossing so many seas, and being set backwards and forwards by innumerable currents and foul winds. The effect upon all on board was electric and, giving way to their admiration, the sailors greeted the commander with a hearty cheer. And what a cheer will we give when, after many a year's sailing by faith, we, at last, see the pearly gates right straight ahead and enter into the fair havens without needing to shift a point! Glory be to the Captain of our salvation! It will be all well with us when the fog of this life's care shall lift, and we shall see the Light of Heaven!

Once more, how go the ships? They not only go according to the wind, guided by the helm and the chart, but some ships will go better than others, according to their build. With the same amount of wind one vessel makes more way than another. Now it is a blessed thing when the Grace of God gives a Christian a good build. There are some Church members who are so oddly shaped that somehow they never seem to cut the water! Even the Holy Spirit does not make much of them. They will get into harbor at last, but they will need a world of tugging. The snail did get into the ark—I often wonder how he did it—he must have got up very early that morning! However, the snail got in as well as the greyhound, and so there are many Christian people who will get to Heaven, but Heaven, alone, knows how, for they are such an odd sort of people that they seem to make no progress in the Divine Life. I would sooner live in Heaven with them forever than be with them 15 minutes here below!

God seems to shape some Christian minds in a more perfect model than others, so that, having simplicity of character, warmth of heart, zealous temperaments and generous spirits, when the wind of the Spirit comes they cut through the foam. Now, I suspect that some good people have, by degrees, become like the "Great Eastern" a short time since, namely, foul under water. They cannot go because they are covered with barnacles. A ship is greatly impeded in its voyage if it carries a quantity of barnacles on her bottom. I know lots of Christian people—I could point them out tonight, but I will not—who are covered with barnacles. They cannot go because of some secret inconsistency, or love of the things of this world rather than the love of God.

They need laying up and cleaning a bit, so as to get some of the barnacles off. It is a rough process, but it is one to which some of God's vessels have to be exposed. What headway they would make towards Heaven if that which hinders were removed! Sometimes, when a man is on a bed of sickness he is losing his barnacles and, sometimes, when a man has been rich and wealthy and has lost all he had, it takes off the barnacles. When we have lost friends we love, and whom we have made idols of, we have been sorry to lose them—but it has cleaned off our barnacles. And when we have got out to sea there has been an ease about the going and we have scarcely known how it was, but God knew that He had made us more fit for His service by the trials of life to which He exposed us.

That is how the ships go. There are many mysteries about them and there are many in us. God makes us go by the gales of His Spirit. O, that we may be trim for going, buoyant and swift to be moved, and so may we make a grand voyage to Heaven with Christ Jesus at the helm!

III. Thirdly and briefly. When I saw these ships go I happened to be near a station of Lloyd's. I noticed that they ran up flags as the vessels went by, to which the vessels replied. I suppose they were asking questions—to know their names and what their cargo was, where they were going, and so on. Now I am going to act as Lloyd's tonight, and put up the flags and ask you something about yourselves. The third point, then, will be—the ships go, LET US SIGNAL THEM.

And, first, who is your owner? "There go the ships," but who is your owner? You do not reply, but I think I can make a guess. There are some hypocrites about who make fine pretensions, but they are not holy-living people! They even dare

to come to the Lord's Table and yet they drink of the cup of devils! They will sing pious hymns with us and then sing lascivious ditties with their friends. I would say to such a man—you are a rotten vessel, you do not belong to King Jesus! Every timber is faithful in His vessels. They are not all what we should like them to be and, as I have said already, they, too, are often covered with barnacles, but still they are all sincere.

The Lord builds His vessels with sound timber and unless we are sincere and right, Christ is not our Owner, but Satan is.

The painted hypocrite is known through the disguise he wears. There is another vessel over there, a fine vessel, too. Look, she is newly painted and looks spick and span. You can see nothing amiss with her. What white sails, and do you notice the many flags? Take the glass and read the vessel's name, and you will see in bold letters, "Self-righteousness." Ah, I know that the owner is not the Lord Jesus Christ, for all the ships that belong to Him carry the red Cross flag and cannot endure the flaunting flag of self-righteousness! All God's people admit that they must be saved by Sovereign Grace! Anything like righteousness of their own they pump overboard as so much leakage and bilge-water.

I see another vessel over yonder, with her sails all spread and every bit of her colors flying. There, there, what a blaze she makes! How proud she seems as she scuds over the water. That vessel is "The Pride," from the port of Self-Conceit, Captain Ignorance. I do not know where she is more often to be seen, but sometimes she crosses this bit of water. I should not wonder if she is in sight here, now, and you may be sure she does not belong to our Lord Jesus. Whether it is pride of money, or person, or rank, or talent, it comes of evil, and Jesus Christ does not own it! You must get rid of all pride if you belong to Him. God grant us to be humble in heart. I could mention some more vessels that I see here tonight, but I will not.

I will rather beg each man and woman to ask himself, "Can I put my hand on my heart and say, 'I am not my own, I am bought with a price?' Did Jesus buy me with His precious blood and do I acknowledge that there is not a timber, spar, rope, or bolt in me but what belongs to Him?" Blessed be His name, some of us can say there is not a hair of our head or a drop of our blood but what belongs to Him! Yours are we, You Son of David, and all that we have! I hope there are vessels here which are owned by the Lord Jesus Christ. Let them never be ashamed to confess their Owner. A vessel on proper business is never ashamed to answer signals. If there should be a smuggler or pirate in the offing, the crews would not be likely to answer signals. But those who are on honest business are ready to reply. And so, Brothers and Sisters, be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear. Never show in your actions that you are ashamed of Jesus, but always let the broad flag be flying in whatever waters you are—"Christ is mine, and I am His. For Him I live. His reproach would I bear and His honor would I maintain."

Our next inquiry is, what is your cargo? "There go the ships," but what do they carry? You cannot tell from looking at them far out at sea, except that you can be pretty sure that some of them do not carry much. Look at that showy brig! You can tell by the look of her that she has not much on board—from the fact of her floating so high it is clear that her cargo is light. Big men, very important individuals, very high-floating people are common, but there is nothing in them! If they had more on board they would not sink deeper in the water. As we said this morning, the more Divine Grace a man has the lower he lies before God.

Well, Brothers and Sisters, what cargo have you got? I am afraid some of you who lie down in the water are not kept down by any very precious cargo, but I fear you are in ballast. I have gone aboard some Christians. I thought there was a good deal in them, but I have not been able to find it. They have a great deal of trouble and they always tell you about it. There is a good old soul I call in to see sometimes. I begin to converse with her and her conversation is always about rheumatism—nothing else! You cannot get beyond rheumatism. That good Sister is in ballast. There is another friend of mine, a farmer. If you talk with him, it is always about the badness of the times. That Brother is in ballast, too.

There are many tradesmen who, though they are Christians, cannot be made to talk of anything but the present dullness of business. I wish they could get that ballast out and fill up with something better, for it is not worth carrying! You must have it, sometimes, I suppose, but it is infinitely better to carry a load of praises, prayers, good wishes, holy doctrines, charitable actions and generous encouragements! Some ships, I think, carry a cargo of powder. You cannot go very near them without feeling you are in danger—they are so very apt to misjudge and take offense. I wish that such persons were made to carry a red flag that we might give them a wide berth.

It is well to be loaded with good things. Young people, study the Word of God. Ask to be taught by experience and, wherever you go, seek to carry the precious commodities which God has made dear to your own soul, that others may be

enriched thereby. It is an interesting sight to see those immense ships loaded with passengers for the colonies. I cannot help praying as I look at them, "God grant that no harm may come to them, but may they safely reach their desired haven." When I look at some of our Brethren whom God is blessing, so that they have a cargo of blessed souls on board, consisting of hundreds who have been brought to Jesus by them, I would to God we had many more!

Thank God, I have sometimes had my decks crowded with passengers who have, from my ministry, received the Gospel. The Lord has brought them on board, and O, I trust before I die He will give me thousands more who will have to thank God that they heard the Gospel from these lips! May we be emigrant vessels bearing souls away into the Glory Land where the days of their mourning shall be ended! Of course we can only be humble instruments, but still, what honor God puts upon His instruments when He makes use of them for this object. "There go the ships." Not ships of war are we, with guns to carry death, but missionary vessels carrying tidings of peace and glad news to the utmost ends of the earth!

Our last signal asks the question—where go the ships? "Where go the ships? Oh, yes, they went merrily down the Channel the other day, but where are they now? In a year's time, who will report all the good vessels which just now passed by our coast? I am looking out upon all of you, anxious to know what port you are making for. Some of you are bound for the Port of Peace. Swiftly may the winds convey you over the waters and safely may you voyage under the convoy of the Lord Jesus! I will try and keep pace with you! I hope that you will sail in company with others of my Master's vessels, but if you have to sail alone over a sea in which you cannot see another sail, may God, the Blessed One, protect and guard you! Bound for the Port of Peace, with Christ on board, insured for Glory, bound for Life Eternal, let us bless the name of the Lord!

But alas, alas, many ships which bid fair for the desired haven are lost on the rocks! Some soul-destroying sin causes their swift destruction. Others, equally fair to look upon, are lost on the sands. They seemed bound for Heaven, but they were not the Lord's. The sands are very dangerous, but they are only a mass of little atoms, soft and yielding. Yet as many ships are lost on the sands as on the rocks. Even so, there are ways and habits of evil which are deceptive—there is apparently nothing very bad about them. Nothing heartbreaking, like rocks, but oh, the multitudes of souls that have been sucked in by sandy temptations! Dear Brothers and Sisters, I hope you are not going that way. God grant you Grace to avoid little sins and I am sure you will keep off the rocks of great sin. In any case, may we turn out to be the Lord's own, and so be kept to the end. Woe unto us if we should prove to be mere adventurers and perish in our presumption!

Among the ships that go to sea, there are some that founder. One does not know how, but they are never heard of again. They were sighted on such-and-such a day, but we shall never more hear any tidings of them. How is that? I have known some of the members of this Church go down in mid-ocean. I never thought it could have happened, but they have gone! I can only imagine how it was. They seemed seaworthy vessels, but they were doubtless rotten through and through. Oh Brothers and Sisters, may God keep you from foundering, as some do by some mysterious sin which seems as if it clasped the soul and dragged it down to the deeps of Hell!

I have known some vessels, too, that have become derelict—waifs and strays upon the sea—men that were the hope of Churches, but who have abandoned themselves to reckless living. They used to worship with the people of God and seemed to be very earnest and zealous. And now, perhaps, at this very moment, they are passing through the gin palace door, or spending this evening in vices which we dare not mention. O, it is dreadful! Many start on their voyage and look as if they were Christ's own vessels—and yet for some strange, unreasonable reason they give all up. And they will be met with, in years to come, drifting about, rudderless, captainless, crewless, dangerous to others and miserable to themselves. God save you from this!

And you, my Friend, though you have been a member of this Church for 20 years, God save you from despairing and sinning furiously, for there, sometimes, come over men strange moments of insanity in which they reverse the whole of their lives, lay violent hands upon an excellent character and become castaways. The Grace of God will save the truly regenerate from this, but, alas, how many high professors never were regenerate at all?! Where will some of the vessels I see before me go? It is a fine fleet I am looking upon. Brothers and Sisters, I hope all of us will be found in that great harbor in Heaven which can accommodate all His Majesty's fleet. O, it will be a great day when we all arrive! Will you give me a hail when you get into port? Will you know me?

I shall be on the lookout for some of you. I cannot help believing that we shall know each other. We have been in rough waters together these 20 years, and we have had some glorious weather, too, have we not? We have seen the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep! I hope we shall keep together till we reach that blessed haven where our fellowship will be eternal! How we will glorify Him who gets us there, even Jesus, the Lord High Admiral of the seas! Christ shall never hear the last of it if I get to Heaven! I will sing, yes, I will sing praises unto His name! I remember preaching once, when half of my congregation quarreled with me when I had done preaching, for I had said—

"Then loudest of the crowd I'll sing While Heaven's resounding mansions ring With shouts of sovereign Grace." As I came downstairs I met one who said, "You will not sing loudest, for I owe more to Grace than you do!" And I found that all the Lord's people said the same!

Well, we will have it out when we get to Heaven—we will try this contention among the birds of Paradise and see which of us can sing the most loudly to the praise of Redeeming Grace! Till then let us trust the Lord Jesus and obey His orders, for He is our Captain and it is our duty to do His bidding. But it would be a dreadful supposition—and yet, perhaps, it may be worse than a supposition—that some of you will have to cast anchor forever in the Dead Sea, whose waves are fire, where every vessel is a prison, where every passenger feels a Hell! What must it be like to be in Hell an hour? I wish some of you could think it over. What must it be like to be shut up in despair for one single day!

If you have a toothache a few minutes, how wretched you are and how anxious to get rid of it! But what must it be to be in Hell even if were for a short time—even it were but for a short time? O, if it came to an end, still would I say, by all the humanities that are in my soul, I charge you, Brothers and Sisters, do not risk the wrath of God! Go not down to the Pit! Pull down that black flag, Man, pull it down and cast off your old owner. Ask Christ to be your Owner! Run up the red flag of the Cross and give yourself to Jesus, for if you do not, your voyage must lead to the gulf of Black Despair where you will suffer forever the result of your sin!

God have mercy upon us and may we never have to pass through the Straits of Judgment into the Gulf of Damnation! May it never be said, "There goes one of the ships that the Tabernacle pilot signaled. It is gone to destruction." May it rather be said of all of us, all in full sail together, as we go towards Heaven, "There go the ships!" Not one of them is drifting to the Gulf of Destruction! Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and all is well with you. Reject Him, and all is ill with you. May He, by His Word, enable you to make a right choice tonight, for His Love's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm 104. HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—551, 686, 656.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ch-spurgeon/there-go-the-ships/>

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