

- **Hello everyone! This is pastor Ethan, and thanks for joining with us. Today is Sunday, June 19th- it is FATHERS DAY. I encourage you to have your Bible, and perhaps my notes from our website. There's also a link to the same map we saw last week illustrating the route Paul took on his journey to Rome.**
- **NEXT WEEK we will complete the book of Acts! Incredible journey... speaking of incredible journeys, last Sunday we took the first half of Paul's journey to Rome. We followed Paul and the other 275 men aboard the ship carrying them across the Mediterranean, in the midst of the greatest storm of their lives. OUR ACTION today picks up immediately where we left off, so lets start by taking one step back Luke's accounting of the Shipwreck on the island of Malta.**

Acts 27:39-44 *When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could. ⁴⁰ Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach. ⁴¹ But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf. ⁴² The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. ⁴³ But the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. ⁴⁴ The rest were to get there on planks or on other pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land safely.*

- **Staggering onto the island, these bedraggled men received a remarkable reception. Against all hope, the natives of the Island received them, helped them, and showed them...**

✠ Unusual kindness

Acts 28:1-2 *Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. ² The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold.*

- **We shouldn't just move on past this scene, because it is remarkable. Few things:**
- **Malta is a small island about 60 miles south of Sicily in the Mediterranean Sea. It's about 18 miles long and 8 miles wide.**
- **What we know of the islands history indicates the natives there spoke the punic language, although a smaller number of them may have spoken some Greek.**
- **In the NIV Luke calls them 'islanders', but a better translation is 'natives', and the actual Greek word is literally translated 'barbarians'.**
- **This doesn't mean they were violent and crude, it simply means they didn't speak either Greek or Latin, and lacked any of the cultural development of their surrounding Greek and Latin world.**
- **In other words, these were people the Ship's owner, captain, passengers, and the Roman soldiers would normally look down on, not associate with- especially given the language barrier.**

- **But now it is these native islanders who come to the rescue of everyone from the ship. Luke tells us the islanders showed unusual kindness.**
- **The Greek word for kindness here is ‘philanthropia’, where of course we get our word ‘philanthropy.’ It refers to a benevolence of unconditional kindness, or a love of humanity.**
- **We only see this word one other place in the NT, in Titus 3. Here Paul is reminding his young friend of essential- and very practical- attributes of being a disciple of Jesus- WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE for the nature and character of Christ to be WHO WE ARE and expressed in HOW WE LIVE.**
- **Now, as is almost always the case in such passages, everything Paul says here regards HOW WE RELATE TO, AND VALUE, OTHER PEOPLE.**
- **Not because they are like us, or even LIKE us, or believe or behave like us- but because they are HUMAN BEINGS.**

Titus 3:1-5 (NASB) *Remind them (believers) to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, ² to slander no one, not to be contentious, to be gentle, showing every consideration for all people. ³ For we too were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.*

- **Here’s where we see our word again-**

⁴ *But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, ⁵ He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we did in righteousness, but in accordance with His mercy,*

- **This kindness- described as the very kindness of God to all humanity- this is the kindness shown by these native islanders- these barbarians- to a huddled mass of nearly drowned men who just happened to wash up on their shore.**
- **POINT- Sincere kindness and sacrificial love that reflects the nature of God is not just found among Christians. In fact, sadly, there have been times throughout Christian history- and within parts of Christian culture today, where this love is hard to find.**
- **In contrast- and yes, sometimes it is in contrast- there are many kind, generous, and loving people in the world who are not Christians, and may be very different from us.**
- **This is a call to humility for us, and a reminder that any expression of the Gospel that lacks a sincere love of humanity- kindness and love for the simple and yet profound reality that all people are immortal souls and creations of God just as we are- any version of the gospel lacking this is not the full Gospel.**
- **It’s a powerful image- these shipwrecked men received the love of God from a people who knew nothing about the love of Christ. AND PAUL, the bearer of Christ’s love, will return their kindness with a blessing only God could bring. BUT FIRST, of course, he’s going to get bit by a snake. Or as Luke phrases it, by a VIPER.**

☩ **The viper** **Acts 28:3-6** *Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. ⁴ When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, “This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, the goddess Justice has not allowed him to live.” ⁵ But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. ⁶ The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead; but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.*

- *You know, I wonder if Paul ever thought to himself “Geez! If it’s not one thing, its another! Survived a shipwreck, and now I’ve got this snake hanging off my hand? REALLY GOD? I mean, c’mon!”*
- *A thing I love about ACTS is there is SO MUCH we can see, think about, from these stories! So, a few things here.*
- *First, Biblical interpreters and scholars have looked at this little excerpt in different ways... what do you do with this?*
- *One view is that this whole account is questionable and Luke just made it up- or it was a fictional bit of tradition- for the purpose of giving Paul credibility as a ‘man of God’ with these islanders. This view is rejected by most scholars, and by me. We’ve talked multiple times about how Luke proves himself to be a reliable historian, and Luke is a firsthand witness at this point.*
- *Another view is that God orchestrated this event, causing Paul to be bit by the snake, again for the purpose of increasing Paul’s credibility to the islanders.*
- *OR, the perspective that I personally hold, is that this is something that HAPPENED, but to what extent God caused it to happen misses the point. It DID happen, and God DID miraculously intervene to protect Paul, and God DID use this for his purposes even though the islanders mis-understood what had happened.*
- *When considering the circumstances of life it can be tempting to ask “Did God make this happen”- but this really isn’t the right question, and it’s not ours to know. This also can lead to the distorted idea that God causes pain and suffering.*
- *NOW, right there someone might think... hold on, Ethan, there’s biblical evidence God might put someone in a difficult circumstance for His purposes, or to draw them to know him more- after all, back in Acts 9 didn’t God say of Paul “I’ll show him how much he must suffer for my name?” Yes, He did.*
- *But God didn’t say “I’ll cause Paul to suffer for my name”. The suffering Paul would face wasn’t God exacting justice for Paul’s sins, nor was it a way to cause Paul to come to love him.*
- *Rather, the suffering God knew Paul would face on account of His bearing his name was the result of the brokenness of the world- the human condition, jealousy, resentment, and fear. And through all of Paul’s sufferings God was right there as his comforter and sustainer.*
- *We need to be very careful and thoughtful about what we attribute to the hand of God, and self-aware of how our words impact people who have suffered trauma.*
- *Many people who have suffered trauma and suffering carry a mistaken belief that what happened to them was God’s punishment because of something they may have done, or something fundamentally wrong with them. If you have struggled with such a thought, hear- God is not the author of suffering and pain.*

- **Jesus Christ- God in the flesh- came to earth, lived among us, as us, and endured the trauma of the cross at our own hands- in order to redeem and DELIVER us from the trauma and suffering of the human condition. God does not violate his own nature in order to accomplish his purposes.**
- **What scripture DOES teach us is that God is present and at work in all things, and will ultimately use all circumstances toward His good, His Glory, and His purposes- as he does right here with Paul.**
- **SO, there is Paul, snake dangling from his hand, and the Islanders wrongly conclude what we just discussed. “He made it through the storm to die by the viper? Surely he brought this on himself! Sure he deserved this and is being punished by divine justice!”**
- **But they were wrong, just as we are wrong when we draw the same conclusions.**
- **Then, when Paul doesn’t die, no big deal, they changed their minds and said he was a god.**
- **It’s interesting that Luke doesn’t tell us Paul’s response. MAYBE one reason is that we’ve already seen how Paul responded to a very similar situation.**
- **On his first missionary journey, back in Acts 14, in the town of Lystra, Paul healed a man resulting in the people of the city attempting to worship him as a God. In response, we are told that Paul and the other disciples tore their robes and exclaimed to the crowd-**
- **“Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them.”**
- **Instead of taking credit for what God had done, Paul says- ‘I’m only human- I’m just like you.’ The only difference between us is that I’ve already received good news that I would love to share with you.**
- **And although Luke doesn’t record it for us, I’ve got to believe that is what happened. What we DO KNOW happened is that here on this tiny spec of land unknown to most people of Mediterranean world, God uses Paul to be a blessing to the entire island.**

☩ **Being a blessing** Acts 28:7-10 *There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and showed us generous hospitality for three days. ⁸ His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. ⁹ When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. ¹⁰ They honored us in many ways; and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed.*

- **Think about this- you’re a resident on the island, maybe Publius, the leader (may have been a roman procurator/magistrate), but here you are on your island when BOOM, this ship crashes on your shore. You, along with your friends and family, help these people, give the food, shelter, and hospitality.**
- **You may have expected some gratitude, although that’s not the reason you did what you did. What you DIDN’T EXPECT is for this person who washed up on your beach- Paul- to bring with him healing for your entire island. You didn’t expect Paul to be a blessing such as your people had never experienced.**

- *But this is what happened. For many on Paul's ship, especially that ship's owner, they may have considered the storm and shipwreck the worst thing to ever happen to them. But for the people of Malta, this was the best thing that ever happened to them, because all of a sudden they had in their midst a person bringing the blessing of God, and in a very practical way- a way that met their needs and made their lives better.*
- *Again, it's interesting that Luke doesn't give any record of Paul preaching the gospel and how the people may have responded. This almost certainly happened, but Luke's focus is to tell us how God worked through Paul to help these island natives, to bless them- and how they in return were a blessing to Paul and all the men of the ship.*
- *CHURCH- this is a powerful reminder that God- through the presence, nature, and character of Christ in us- will use us to be a transformative presence in our communities and the lives of people around us.*
- *Make no mistake!! As followers of Christ, we are called to be bearers of the Good news of who Jesus is, what He has done, and how he extends to all people the hope of NEW LIFE.*
- *But we can't forget that God calls us to be salt and light in our community- We are called to make this world a better place, and often this will be through just showing kindness and expressing God's love in very practical ways- to ANYONE.*
- *Friends, IN CHRIST we have been BLESSED- and we are called to be a blessing.*
- *If that sounds familiar, you heard it all the way back from Genesis, in God's original calling to Abraham- or still Abram at this point.*
- *You could make a strong case that this is the second most important event in human history, second only to the cross. At this pivotal moment, do you remember what God said?*

Genesis 12:1-2 *The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. ² "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.*

- *I will bless you, and you will be a blessing. God goes on to say "and all peoples on the earth will be blessed through you."*
- *A NT world view holds that this blessing was fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ. As disciples of Jesus, we have already received the fullness of this blessing- AND AS THE BODY OF CHRIST, as people whose LIFE IS IN CHRIST, we are now part of how God is continuing to bless the world.*
- *Listen to how Paul described this in his letter to the Romans.... What it looks like to be a blessing...*

Romans 12:9-16 *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.*

– **Let me expand that a bit... with honesty to this text, we could also say “Bless those whom you fear. Bless those who think very differently from you. Bless those whom you think are the problem. Bless them- be the presence of Christ’s nature and character to them- and do not curse them- do now wish ill of them.”**

– **RATHER...**

¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. **OR- those whom you would be tempted to look down on or thing ill of...**

Do not be conceited.

– **In a hurting and divided world, may we be people of unusual kindness.**

– **LUKE GOES ON- The story continues, and as Paul and his companions finally draw near to Rome, we see a simple and beautiful picture of what it looks like to BE THE BODY...**

✠ **Being the Body Acts 28:11-16** *After three months we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island—it was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux. ¹² We put in at Syracuse (**port city on Sicily**) and stayed there three days. ¹³ From there we set sail and arrived at Rhegium. (**toe of Italy**) The next day the south wind came up, and on the following day we reached Puteoli. ¹⁴ There we found some brothers and sisters who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. ¹⁵ The brothers and sisters there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these people Paul thanked God and was encouraged. ¹⁶ When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.*

– **Few quick things.**

– **Forum of Appius and the ‘Three Taverns’ are locations we know of from other ancient writings- they were about 31 miles south of Rome on the Appian way, a major thoroughfare.**

– **You really get the sense here that Paul is now leading this expedition. It’s likely the other prisoners from the ship have been sent elsewhere, or are under other guard, and now Paul, Luke, and Aristarchus are likely traveling with Julius the Centurion and a smaller detachment of soldiers.**

– **Speculating a bit, but sense of the text is that when Luke says ‘WE spend a week with the brothers and sisters’, he is referring to their entire party.**

– **I can imagine this scene where Julius, perhaps sitting at a table with Paul over dinner in the home of these other believers, saying... Remember Paul, I’m in charge here.**

– **What we see here are these fellow believers eager to meet Paul, care for him, and help him on his way. The believers from Rome traveled a day or so to reach them, and by meeting Paul- and his Roman guard- they identified themselves as fellow Christians. This is just four years before Nero’s great persecution of believers began in Rome, and so their identification with Paul carried no small risk.**

– **But this is what we are called to do, who we are as the body of Christ. We love each other. We are called to care for and support each other, seek out fellowship with each other. Luke tells us that when Paul saw these fellow believers, he thanked God and was encouraged. May this be said of us.**

- **OKAY! PAUL IS IN ROME.** We only have 14 more verses to go, which we will cover **NEXT WEEK**, and **RIGHT NOW**, we will wrap up with the biggest theme of this story since Paul boarded that ship back in Caesarea.

† The big theme

- **It's this. GOD'S WORD CAN BE TRUSTED.** God had told Paul he would travel to Rome to face Nero, and Paul has now arrived in Rome.
- **NOW, the trip didn't go the way he probably thought it would!** Since he first sensed God's call to this journey, Paul has been beaten in a riot, imprisoned and nearly flogged, survived multiple murder attempts, taken by a small army to Caesarea and held there for over two years, appeared and testified before the two highest authorities in the middle eastern world at that time, survived a catastrophic Mediterranean storm and shipwreck, was bitten by a **VIPER** for crying out loud... and he **ARRIVED IN ROME.**
- **And every step along that journey, God was with him, reassuring him, guiding him, protecting him, and encouraging him.**
- **My friends, GOD'S WORD CAN BE TRUSTED.**
- **NOW- that said, part of our life long journey as believers is discerning what God's word says, what it means, what it is!** In Christian culture we are sometimes guilty of claiming promises God hasn't made.
- **But God's word to us is good, precious, CHALLENGING, and life giving, and it can be trusted.**
- **In 2 Peter 1:3-5, we hear this encouragement, and I'll end with this.**

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

- **Paul's journey to Rome was a journey of participating in God's divine nature. This is the journey God has brought us into as well.**