THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

OCTOBER 31ST–NOVEMBER 1ST // THE BOOK OF ACTS

MIRACLES ON MALTA (ACTS 28:1–10)

Chapter 28 continues the story of Paul's journey to Rome to stand before Caesar.

- Paul and his traveling companions had been shipwrecked in Ch. 27 due to a violent storm, and now in Ch. 28, they discover the island they've washed up on is Malta.
- This is good news for the crew because it means they're only 60–70 miles off course and can spend the winter in Malta safely.

Malta is a small island about 50 miles south of Sicily, Italy, and 180 miles north of Libya.

- The local people of Malta welcome the 276 castaways with a fire because it is raining and cold (v. 2).
- While Paul picks up sticks to help keep the fire going, he is bitten on the hand by a poisonous snake, and immediately a judgment is made as to why it happened.

The spiritual meaning the natives attached to this incident was that Paul was apparently a murderer and the god of Justice had punished him.

- But Paul knows that God had already given him a promise that he'd get to Rome safely, and no poisonous snake was going to get in the way of that.
- So, Paul shakes the snake off into the fire and goes about his business (v. 5).

When Paul doesn't "swell up" or "suddenly drop dead," the people begin to make claims that he's a god!

- Apparently, the incident so impresses the chief official of the island, a guy named Publius, that he invites Paul into his home and has Paul pray for his father who is sick (vs. 7–8).
- Publius's father is healed, and others from the island who are sick begin to come (v. 9).

Two different words for "heal" appear in verses 8 and 9: "*iasato*" and "*therapeuo*."

- One refers to supernatural healing, and the other refers to medical treatment.
- Luke was a doctor, so it might be that while prayers for healing were definitely happening, medical treatment was also taking place.
- Christianity is not anti-medicine, nor is the belief in divine healing.

After spending three months of winter on the island of Malta, the Christians set sail, greatly honored by those to whom they had ministered.

- What's incredible about this incident is that Paul's impact on the people of Malta began as they watched him respond to being bitten by a snake.
- The world is watching how we respond when we experience difficulty and pain.

CONSIDER GOD'S WORK IN THIS PART OF THE STORY...

The Christian community on Malta today can trace its origins directly to the events in this passage in 60 A.D. (St. Paul's Bay, St. Paul's grotto, St. Paul's Cathedral at the palace of Publius).

- For that to have happened, there first had to be a shipwreck.
- Then there had to be a snake bite, and then Paul's response to that snake bite.

IN LIFE, YOU'RE GOING TO GET BIT.

Tragedy, crisis, attacks, criticism, and difficulty will happen in our lives. Sometimes, others form assumptions and judgments about why things happened to us or about our character because of what's happened.

- The truth is the ancient serpent (Satan) is still lurking and seeking to bite—he's a lot of things, but he's no quitter.

WHEN YOU GET BIT, HOW WILL YOU RESPOND?

Some will respond by biting back—hurt people often hurt people.

- Some will play the victim and justify their foolish and sinful responses to their pain.
- Simply believing God, staying faithful to Him, and "shaking off" the attacks when they come has an unbelievably powerful impact on us and on the world around us. God has a purpose.

SHAKE IT OFF

God never minimizes your hurt, pain, suffering, or difficulty. God always cares and sees.

- Negativity breeds negativity—complaining people usually find ways to complain about almost anything and everything.
- There are times in our lives when the most God-honoring thing we can do is simply to shake off the attacks and keep going.

WELCOMES ON THE WAY (ACTS 28:11–16)

After three months (most likely around February), the group sets sail again on an Alexandrian ship with the "twin gods" as a figurehead.

- Castor and Pollux, the twin sons of Zeus, were the patron gods of sailors and considered a good luck charm by many in the ancient world.
- Luke is probably making a joke about their luck as they get onboard, considering what happened to them back in Ch. 27.

Sailing in the ancient world depended on the wind and the weather, so the ship hops from seaport to harbor, catching whatever favorable wind or weather it can.

- Finally, they came to a place called Puteoli, and they spent a week with the Christian community there (v. 13).
- From there, they most likely walked northwest towards Rome.

It seems a bit unusual for a prisoner like Paul to be given such liberty, but we have to remember that he wasn't dangerous, had favor with the Romans, and most likely had a soldier with him at all times.

- The Christians in these places on the road to Rome treated Paul with exceptional hospitality and kindness. Groups traveled miles to visit, encourage, and spend time with him.

Paul had never been to Rome until this moment, but the Christian community there knew him well.

- He'd written his letter to the Church of Rome about 2 or 3 years earlier from the city of Corinth.
- It was customary when an emperor visited a city for the people to go out to meet him and escort him in.
- As the Believers walk him into the city, Paul thanks God and takes courage (v. 15).

Paul is finally in Rome—the place Jesus Himself promised he would get to safely.

- Paul is not only seeing the fulfillment of that promise; he is being greeted by a community of Believers he wrote to and loved from afar.
- When Paul finally arrives in Rome, he is allowed to stay by himself in his own place, essentially under "house arrest" (v. 16).

God knows that we all need encouragement, love, and community.

- God knows how to send us the encouragement we need at just the right time.
- God uses His people to send that encouragement. Unfortunately, sometimes we're bad at encouraging others. It's difficult for some of us to talk about anything besides ourselves, our needs, and what we know.

THE CHALLENGE

Introduce yourself to someone and ask them about them (resist the urge to talk about yourself).

- Invite someone out to eat after church or have them over for dinner during the week.
- If you notice something good in another person, say it! Compliment, encourage, and speak life to the people around you.
- Ask, "how can I pray for you?" and do it right away.

PAUL IN ROME (ACTS 28:17–31)

In 60 A.D., Rome had been a city for 800 years and had a population of about two million.

- The Coliseum was not yet built, but the prominent buildings were the temple of Jupiter, the palaces of Caesar, and a temple to Mars (the god of war).
- This was a city unlike anything Paul had ever seen—it was the very heart of the Roman Empire.

Even in Rome under house arrest, there was still gospel work to be done.

- Because he was under house arrest, Paul probably couldn't have met with the Jews in the synagogue, so they either came to his house or met with him in some other place of their choosing.
- These Jewish people were completely unfamiliar with the charges against Paul.

Jews in Rome had been expelled from the city 10 years before Paul arrived and were just now returning. They had been scattered and disconnected from other Jews.

- Not only that, but the winter months would have kept communication between Jerusalem/Caesarea and Rome from happening.
- So, Paul gets to start with a clean slate and tell them about the hope of the resurrection in Christ.

So, a large group of them come to his dwelling, and he teaches them about the person of Jesus from "dawn to dusk."

- What is the result? Some are persuaded, and others disbelieve (v. 24).
- There are always mixed responses to the gospel.
- There rises amongst them a "disagreement" which leads them to depart from Paul's house after he quotes Isaiah 6:9–10.

Isaiah's prophecy was saying that the truth of God was right in front of them, but their hearts were hardened, and they couldn't see or hear spiritually.

- Jesus used this passage to demonstrate Israel's stubbornness and unwillingness to listen to the truth (Matthew 13:13–15).
- Now Paul is echoing the words of Jesus and telling them that this is why he has spent his life taking the gospel to the Gentiles.

For two years, Paul lived in Rome "in his rented house," welcoming all who came to him and proclaiming Christ with boldness and without hindrance, even under house arrest.

- During this time, he wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, and many of those whom he had discipled or ministered to visited him while he was in Rome.

The narrative of Acts ends rather abruptly, and we're left to world and church history to draw conclusions as to what happened to Paul.

- The Roman statute of limitations on accusations would have run out in 18 months, so maybe Paul's case was dismissed, and he was free to go.
- Reliable church history states that Paul did stand before Caesar Nero and preach the gospel.

2 Timothy 4:16–18 speaks of a second trial approaching in a tone that indicates Paul knew his day of death was coming, so a popular theory is that Paul was re-arrested in 67 A.D. and beheaded in Rome by order of Emperor Nero.

- At any rate, Paul never really stopped preaching, teaching, and spreading the gospel until the day he died—it just looked different in the later seasons of his life.

THE ACTS OF JESUS' WITNESSES STILL GO ON...

- This truth of the gospel was spread (and is being spread) all around the world by men and women like Paul, Peter, and others who lived their lives in faithful service to God.
- These are those who believe God, stay faithful to God, stay on mission ("keep the main thing the main thing"), and shake off the attacks when they come.

THE SNAKES WILL BITE, YET GOD'S WORK GOES ON.

- In the early church, there was persecution, criticism, inward scandals, false teaching, and enemies to God's work and people.
- The early Believers weren't immune to tragedy, pain, heartache, loss, and difficulty either.
- Yet they endured, and we honor them today.
- Grieve what you need to grieve, bring it to God, and shake off the snake. God's not done.

THOUGH SOME REJECT IT, STILL IT GOES ON.

- We're not responsible for how people respond to the truth of Jesus—we're simply responsible for speaking it and living it out.
- Some will reject it and ridicule us for believing it, but the Kingdom of God will still advance.
- The question we must ask ourselves is: "If I truly believe this, am I faithfully proclaiming it and living it out?"

WHERE'S YOUR PLACE IN THE STORY?

- We can be masterful excuse-makers for why we can't serve God in our season/situation.
- Under the constraints of house arrest, Paul gets creative and seeks to serve God—even in his chains!
- How can you be a witness for Jesus in your everyday life? How can you encourage others who are seeking to do this as well?