

94. Paul Ministered on the Island of Malta

In our last topic, we saw that we want to show our physical and spiritual children how to bring glory to God. We saw that Paul certainly brought glory to God by the things he said and did as he used the circumstances of the terrible storm to show the people on the ship that his trust was in the Lord; because of that trust, they did not need to be fearful, but could be encouraged. In this topic, we will see that Paul also had a great impact on the people of the island where the ship had been shipwrecked.

Acts 28:1-2 says, “Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta. And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold.” In the last topic, we saw that the ship Paul was taking to Italy was shipwrecked. However, God had sent His angel to tell Paul that all those traveling with him on the ship would live. Those on the ship had all escaped and found out that they were on the island of Malta. Malta is a fairly small island, only nine miles wide and seventeen miles long.

The people who lived on the island of Malta showed great kindness to the people who had been on the ship. The word translated “natives” was the word used by the Greeks of any foreigner that did not know the Greek language. The natives of the island built a fire so that the people who had been on the ship could get dry. They also made all of the people from the ship feel welcome and accepted because of their kindness. The fire was needed, because the rain was continuing to fall and it was cold. Here, we see that the Lord can use acts of kindness to make people feel accepted and welcome.

Acts 28:3-6 says, “But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid *them* on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand. So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, ‘No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live.’ But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.” Paul immediately began gathering wood to help the fire continue to burn.

The word translated “viper” is the word used for a poisonous snake. Mark 16:18 had a promise that would apply here, “‘They will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.’” We are going to see that nothing happened to Paul. The word is used four other times in the New Testament. John the Baptist used the word in Matthew and Luke to describe the Pharisees and Sadducees and their teaching. Christ also used the word twice to describe the same groups and their false teachings. However, in this verse, it was used to describe a very poisonous snake. As a result, we see that the false teachings of these groups were like the poison of a very poisonous snake.

As Paul was putting the wood that he had gathered on the fire, a viper came up out of the fire and

bit the hand of Paul and remained fastened to his hand. The natives who had built the fire to help the people from the ship dry out and get warm immediately thought that Paul must be guilty of murder. Here, we are reminded of the fact that many people are quick to judge others when they see something bad happen to them. Christ said, in Matthew 7:1-2, “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.” Even though it is common in the world to quickly judge others, as Christians we are not to judge. Instead, we are to leave all judgment to the Lord. The natives said that even though Paul had survived the storm, justice was not going to allow him to live.

Meanwhile, Paul just shook the viper into the fire. The Lord had chosen to protect him and the bite of the viper did not cause anything to happen to Paul. Usually, when a person is bitten by a very poisonous snake, the body will quickly begin to swell up in size, especially the area close to the bite. The natives watched Paul and waited for him to begin to swell or even to suddenly fall down dead. Instead, nothing happened to Paul. The people of the island were very surprised when they saw that nothing happened and so they continued to watch Paul for a long time.

However, when nothing happened to Paul the people changed their minds and decided that Paul must be a god. This is not the first time that people had come to that conclusion about Paul. The people of Lystra had also decided that Paul was a god when he healed the man that had been born crippled. Acts 14:11 says, “Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian *language*, ‘The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!’” The people of Lystra thought that Paul and Barnabas were gods that had come to their city in the form of men. They prepared to offer sacrifices to them until Paul stopped them. Later, the people of that city stoned Paul so we see that the minds of people can change very quickly. Here, we see that the opposite had happened. The people had thought that Paul was a murderer and then decided that he must be a god instead.

Acts 28:7-10 says, “In that region there was an estate of the leading citizen of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days. And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him. So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed. They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary.” In these verses, we see that Paul ministered on that island in other ways during the time that the people from the ship were on the island.

The estate of Publius, the Roman governor of the island, was near the place where the ship was wrecked. Publius invited Paul and those with him to come to his estate. He entertained them and provided for them. In fact, he showed great kindness for three days. When Paul learned that the father of Publius was sick with a fever and dysentery, Paul saw an opportunity to minister to Publius and his family. Paul went to see the father and prayed for him. Then, Paul laid hands on the father and the father was healed by the Lord.

The rest of the people on the island heard that the father of Publius had been healed. Then, the

people from throughout the island who had diseases came to Paul and they were all healed. Here, we see that all were healed. This is an example of the way that the Lord confirmed the ministry of the apostles and their message about the resurrection. Hebrews 2:3-4 says, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?” The same thing had happened earlier in the ministry of Peter. Acts 5:16 says, “Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.” Here, we see that God healed all that were sick.

The Scripture also gives instructions for Christians about praying for the sick today in James 5:14-16. Those verses say, “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” Here, we see that we are to call the elders of the church and together they are to pray for the one who is sick. We are reminded that the Lord is the One who is the Healer. We see that sometimes sickness is caused by sin. In such a case, that sin will also be forgiven. Since it is the elders that pray rather than just one person, then all glory will go to God and not to the person.

The people on the island were very thankful for the way that the Lord had worked in the lives of all those who had diseases. As a result, the people of the island showed great kindness to Paul and the team of men with him (which included at least Aristarchus and Luke). The people honored this team in many different ways. This also provided many opportunities for Paul and the others to share the Gospel with the people of the island over the next three months before they left the island. Here, we see that one of the reasons that God allowed this terrible storm that caused the ship to be shipwrecked was to give the people of this island the opportunity to hear the Gospel and see the power of God work in their lives.

Three months later, the Roman centurion was able to get booking for the soldiers and prisoners on a ship that had spent the winter at the island. When Paul and the others got ready to leave the island on that ship, the people of the island provided the things that were needed by Paul and the team as they made the final part of their trip to the city of Rome. Here, we are reminded again of the way the Lord provides for those who are faithful in their service for Him. We also want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that the Lord will provide the things that they need as we let them see how the Lord provides for our needs. That will make it possible for our children to learn to trust the Lord to provide their daily needs as they serve the Lord and help others to learn about Him. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to see how the Lord supplies our daily needs.