

Let's open our Bibles tonight to Acts 28. I hope you'll all be there at the baptism this Saturday. It's good if you've been baptized; it's wonderful when you're being baptized, and people are there to support you and cheer you on and witness your outward commitment to the Lord. So we have a church in the Ukraine that had a baptism about, I guess, seven or eight weeks ago in the ice - actually cut ice away - and those are people that want to be baptized. (Laughing) I'm tellin' ya. This is like the pool's 100 degrees, you get to eat as much as you want (from people that actually know how to cook). It's not really a hard devotion, but the hard comes afterwards - walking with the Lord in the world. Right?

So, Acts 28:1. What began for Paul as a desire years ago in fact, if you have been with us, in Acts 19:21 Paul said, as he was leaving and traveling, that he wanted to go through Macedonia, he wanted to go to Achaia again (that's in Corinth). And he said, after that, "I want to go to Jerusalem, and after I go to Jerusalem, I've got to see Rome." Paul had not been to Rome. We don't know where the church in Rome began or who started it. If you go to Rome, they'll tell you a different story. But the Bible is very silent about how that church began. However, Paul had great desire to go there. In fact, in Romans 1:13, when Paul wrote to them, he told them that he longed to go there and bear some fruit. He said, "I've been hindered. Every time I've tried to come, I've been hindered. But I really want to come." And that was Paul's heart. I don't think that Paul really planned to go in chains. In Jerusalem, when he was first arrested for the accusation for some Jewish folks from Ephesus that said he had brought a Gentile into the Temple area - and then he spent (it would become) two years by the time he was sent off to Caesarea and now to Rome - the Lord had stood by Paul, there in Jerusalem, and Paul had so wanted to speak to the Jews. His heart was to give his life for the Jews, yet God had sent him to the Gentiles. I don't think that was his choice, but God sent him to bear witness to them. And Paul, after he spoke to the Jews there on the Antonia Fortress steps, so discouraged at the response; he was sure that this was going to convince them to start following the Lord. Instead, they rioted, and Paul went back to his cell, and he was discouraged. And that night, in Acts 23, it was the Lord who came and stood by Paul. He had done it before, and He would do it again. But He said (verse 11), "Paul, you be of good cheer. You've testified for me in Jerusalem. I'm going to have you bear witness for Me in Rome."

And Paul knew, at least in that day, that the Lord would one day take him to Rome. Little, like I said, did Paul realize how tough the road was going to be to get there. Although God had told Paul when he got saved outside the city of Damascus - on the road that one fateful day - that He had said that He would "show him what great things he would have to suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9:16). So Paul had suffered. In fact, I've been working on 2 Corinthians, the last part of chapter 4 today, and Paul called everything he went through "a light affliction." And I thought either he doesn't know the definition of "light" or he's delusional because I don't know anyone in the Bible that went through more stuff than Paul. But Paul was a faithful guy who hung in there, and the Lord led him as he went.

We've told you before - and we're going to finish Acts next week (this should be the last map you have to look at for a while) - that narrative studies like the book of Acts, like the historical books in the Old Testament, you draw your lessons from the activity that God reports to you of. You go stand in the places where the people that you read about stand. You seek to look at life the way that the situations that they find themselves in. And the lessons can be doctrinal or support doctrine, but they're not necessarily doctrinal teaching as much as they are support of the things that you know about God - in behavior, in experience. And so that's certainly true in this last chapter of the book of Acts as well. Paul's travels to Rome - we want to put our feet where he was and kind of look at things through his eyes because this is what the Lord has given us to learn about our walks and our relationship with Him.

Having left several weeks earlier from Caesarea to go to Rome, Paul had asked to have a trial there; it was his right as a citizen. They had hobbled along. It was already late in the year; it was getting towards winter, certainly. It was a dangerous time to sail, but yet they had made the decision to go. You can see on the map there that they went north to Sidon, and then they passed where Paul really grew up in Tarsus and Cilicia; went on the other side, the north side of Cyprus, and then they came to a place called Myra, and then they went to Cnidus. But when they tried to go to Cnidus, they kind of got blown off track, got pushed down below Crete, and you can tell that things weren't getting so much better for them sailing wise. They went to the leeward side of the island. They landed at a place called Fair Havens. Paul spoke up as a prisoner and implored them to just say, "Let's not do this anymore. It's dangerous. Let's just stay here. It's late in the year. We're in danger." But the owner of the ship, the captain as well, said to the centurion who was so good to Paul (a good guy, really, like all centurions in the New

Testament), "Oh, no, no. We have this under control. We do this all of the time. We're good for this. We're only gonna sail 60 more miles to the other side of Crete, and there's a city there that we would like to dock at called Phoenix (Phenice), and they have great dinner places - a great place to just spend the winter before we move on." Instead, they were blown away from the island very quickly. They weren't even able to make the 60 miles, and they spent the next two weeks in a storm that panicked seasoned sailors. They never saw the sun, they didn't know where they were going. The fear was, "We're headed for North Africa, and we're gonna get buried there in the Sandbanks, and that's gonna be the end of us." Nobody knew where they were at. They lightened the ship, they tied it down, they pulled in the dinghy, they held on for dear life. But the narrative said to us, last week, that even these sailors - about day four, day five, day six - began to say, "This is it. We're done. We're cooked. We'll never be able to make it." When sailors panic, you know the storm is bad. In that despair, and Paul locked up in the bowels of the ship as a prisoner, Paul began to pray; not that the Lord would save him because the Lord had already said to him, "You're gonna make it to Rome." So Paul wasn't worried about that. He was worried about the people with him. And he began to pray, and it wasn't until a few days later that an angel of the Lord came and stood by him and said, "Paul, you've got to get to Rome. I want to use you in Rome. I'm going to give you what you've asked for - the souls of all that are with you. But you're going to lose the ship, but you're going to make it." And Paul took this good news to the deck, and he offered it to everyone. And he said, "I believe God. God has never failed me. It's going to be as He said." And he encouraged the people, and Paul, the prisoner, became Paul, the leader on the ship - with 275 other people.

A couple nights later, they heard crashing of waves. They were fearful as to where they might be heading. They threw out some anchors and tried to hold fast until the morning. They saw that they were near a beach, that there was a passageway. Paul saw a few of the sailors who were going to abandon ship and leave everybody else to get beat down by the waves, and Paul spoke up again and said, "Look, if they leave, I can't guarantee you what the Lord said because He's counting on everyone to be here." And so they cut away the boats, and they made these guys all stay, and then Paul said, "Hey, let's eat. We haven't eaten for two weeks. Imagine. We haven't eaten for two weeks!" Got sick out in the ocean. "Be of good cheer." Well, finally the boat runs into a sandbar and begins to break in the breakwaters, and Paul said, "Let's just swim for it." And the soldiers, afraid of losing prisoners (according to Roman law, if you lost prisoners you suffered their

fate), they just decided, "We'll just kill the prisoners." And Paul again looked to the centurion who liked Paul and wanted to save Paul and said, "No, no, no. Just let 'em swim. If you can't swim, hang on to somethin'." And through the intervention of the Lord and God's hand upon Paul and these men - 276 people - not one of them was lost; they all made land. And we left them last week, standing, dripping wet, cold, in the wind, on the island of Malta, on the seashore; 276 as God had been faithful to keep them. It wasn't Club Med, but it was safety for these guys. But the boat was gone. There's a great Psalm, Psalm 107:29-30, that says, "He calms the storm, so that its waves are still. Then they are glad because they are quiet; so He guides them to their desired haven." Oh, it must have been quite a relief for these guys to stand where they are.

Well, tonight, we're going to pick up in verse 1 down through verse 16. Next week we will finish with Paul's stay in Rome, and the report of these two years in Paul's life are recorded for us in about sixteen verses. So, tonight verses 1 through 16. Let's start at verse 39 of chapter 27 just to kind of get where we were at. "When it was day, they did not recognize the land; but they observed a bay with a beach, onto which they planned to run the ship if possible. And they let go the anchors and left them in the sea, meanwhile loosing the rudder ropes; and they hoisted the mainsail to the wind and made for shore. But striking a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves. And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape. But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from their purpose, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land, and the rest, some on boards and some on parts of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land." Chapter 28:1, "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." Malta obviously still exists today. You can speak English (it's the national language), and Maltese, which is kind of an aberrant form of Arabic, is spoken there. It was ruled by the British until 1964, when Malta gained its independence. But whoever was with them, they recognized when they got there the place that it was, and instead of being off course, which they thought after two weeks, "Man, we're gonna die in North Africa down toward Libya," they found themselves really at the boot of Italy, only 200 miles from Puteoli, which is the port where you would put in and then you'd have to walk or ride a horse or

whatever it is, 150 miles or so up or north along the Appian Way, the Roman road to Rome.

It is easy, I think, for us to forget sometimes that God is busy accomplishing His work even when there's a storm. You know, you're so caught up in, "Where are we gonna end up?" that you fail to look around and go, "Man, the Lord's doin' somethin' here!" But we might feel lost at sea and adrift and think we're moving further away from our intended goals because God is either not watching or doesn't care. He does. And at least in every place that the Bible gives us narrative, when people are stuck in these situations that seem to be no way out - what looks like a storm - God is oftentimes accomplishing His will. We talked last week about the kinds of storms that the Bible sets before us - storms of correction, storms of perfection, storms of protection and storms of direction - and that's really what you find. But in the midst of things, you may be going through things tonight and you wonder, "Man, how come the Lord hasn't answered?" as if somehow He's just done with you. "I'll see you next Thursday." No, no. He's doin' something. You're goin' somewhere. God is ever at work. He doesn't waste your tears. He doesn't waste suffering. He doesn't look the other way.

And at least these folks on the boat thought, "Man, we could be who knows where," but they ended up a couple hundred miles from where they were headed to begin with. It wasn't an easy trip, but they certainly didn't end up where they thought that they would.

Notice that we read (Luke writing) "the natives showed us unusual kindness." This was mid-November. It would have been freezing cold in that part of the world at the time if it was normal temperature. The people of Malta came out to help the shipwrecked, 276 in all, started a big fire for them, helped them to dry out, helped any way they could. It's an interesting phrase, though - "unusual kindness." These were pagans, pagan in the sense of being unbelievers. They worshipped lots of weird gods; they had weird ideas like they learned from the Romans, they learned from the Greeks. But they had a natural affection in the sense that though they were not saved, they only were made in the image of God, sin had clouded that a lot, but yet there was still in their heart this willingness to be kind in the generic kind of a sense. It's kind of like the parable of the Good Samaritan. This guy really wasn't moved by his love for the Lord; it was moved by natural kindness, by his religious kind of convictions and all. So, even in Matthew 24, when we read about the end times, when the Lord returns to judge the nations, we are told in

Matthew 24 that the nations in one way are judged by their treatment of Israel, God's people - how they reached out, or didn't, to them. So there is something to be said for this measure of understanding that God gives to all men. Paul said to the Romans in chapter 2:14, "If the Gentiles by nature do the things written in the law, but they don't have the law, then you can see that this conscience is at work and this gift that God has given is able to work itself out. They become a law unto themselves, and they know what's right and they know what's wrong." And regardless of the idolatry in the island, when the people were in need, everybody stood up to help. They're not saved. There's a goodness in their hearts. The capacity to do good, unfortunately, is oftentimes lost due to sin. So, they "showed us unusual kindness." To Paul, I think, and to Luke's words, it literally meant that's not natural to man.

Once you get saved, the most natural thing that you have in your life is God's love. In fact, Jesus said "by it all men will know you belong to Me" (John 13:35). It's the outstanding mark of a Christian, right? The love of God, the willingness to give others the benefit of the doubt, mercy and grace like you have received. It's a quality that becomes evident in your life. And if you want, the love of God is most often manifest in the New Testament through hospitality, through the willingness to help others, give to others, bless others in whatever manner you need to be blessed. In fact, when Paul makes that list for elders (the qualifications for elders - 1 Timothy 3 - and, by the way, in that list of twenty things, all of them are really non-, I won't say non-spiritual), I'll say nineteen out of the twenty are things that all of us, as Christians, should have. The aptness to teach, the ability to communicate God's Word in a way that an elder would is different although we're all called upon to teach the Bible and share the Scriptures. But one of the qualifications in that long list is hospitality. It's something that you should find in the life of a leader. You should find it in the life of people in general. It's Peter that wrote in (1 Peter) chapter 4:9, "Be hospitable to one another, and don't grumble about it." "I'll help you." (Pastor Jack speaks in a grumbling tone.) That's not right. "Get in. You need a ride, I'll go." (Again a grumbling tone.) Not exactly the way the Lord intended it to be. But, "In so doing," Paul said to the Hebrews (13:2), "you can entertain angels unawares." Right? Sometimes your hospitality and you end up ministering to an angel. Now I don't know who they are, but I do remember reading there in Genesis 18 about those travelers that came to Abraham's house and how they entertained them and welcomed them and all and those three visitors on the way to Sodom.

So Luke was moved by the fact that these heathen - unbelieving idolaters - had a kindness to people that were in need and that certainly you see it in the lost, man, we'd better find it in the lives of the saved. When Jesus sent His disciples out in Matthew, He said to them (chapter 10:41-42), "If you give to a prophet in the name of the prophet, you'll receive a prophet's reward; and if anyone would receive a righteous man in the name of a righteous man, he'll get a reward. And if you just give a cup of cold water to one of these little ones of mine in the name of a disciple, you'll not lose your reward." So I think there's something to be said for the natural grace of men that God rewards, that He honors, that He watches. And I would say, for the people of Malta, God rewarded them for their graciousness in a real way. Paul will preach the gospel to an island that maybe had never heard it; the people that were sick there, and there was a disease that even historically infiltrated this island for years, and somehow the Lord stepped in to help this generation. So there's this rewarding, this kindness that God extends to those that are kind. It has nothing to do with eternal life, obviously, but it has to do with God's goodness. When the disciples were sent out two-by-two (in Luke 9), and they were given instructions by the Lord on how they were going to survive - because they were told, really, to take nothing with them - the Lord said to them (verses 4-5), "Look, if you go into a town, and the people that are there want to receive you, then stay where you're at. Don't go lookin' for a better deal or go from house to house. If God has provided through the kindness of others for you, then stay there. If not, just shake the dust off your feet and move along, and I'll be sure to provide for you, and that'll be a testimony against them." When Paul wrote to the Romans, he talked about distributing to the needs of the saints and that we should be given to hospitality (chapter 12:13). So there is this distinction made in the Bible between natural kindness. It is unusual in the sense of it's coming from the world and yet this kindness and this mercy that comes from your life, as a Christian, when you hear the gospel and you believe in the things of God.

So they landed, they knew where they were, the population came out - the natives, and they were kind enough to dry them and clothe them and care for their immediate needs.

Verse 3 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." That doesn't sound good. I love Paul's example because, again, narrative - Paul is leading by example. Paul, the guy who's been orchestrating the shows in Caesarea, lands. Everybody's getting help and blankets and, "Here's fire, and stand over here," and

Paul goes, "I'll go get wood." Not exactly the thing you always find in leaders. Right? Example, by the way, in the Bible is the best teaching tool available, bar none. It is what discipleship is all about. We had our meeting last Thursday with over 300 folks that are in ministry here every week. They serve, they're faithful. It was fun. We got to meet people that some of us had never known and knew what they were involved with. But we talked a little bit about example because you can talk until you're blue in the face, but what do you do? Right? That old line about "what you are doing is yelling so loud, I can't hear what you're saying." Paul's a great example of a man who God can use because of the way that he lived his life. When Peter wrote to the scattered church, he said (in 1 Peter 2:21), "God has called you to follow Christ who also suffered for you, left you an example. You should follow in His footsteps." Do what Jesus did. Paul wrote to Timothy, who was 40 years old when he took over the Ephesian church for the first time, and he said to Timothy, who was a young guy by comparison (for him to be in that position, that was a young man), and Paul said to him (1 Timothy 4:12), "Let no one despise your youth, Timothy, but you be an example. Be an example of a believer. Do it in your word, in your conduct, in your love, in your spirit, in your faith, in your purity." Just be an example, and people will see the difference. And I love the fact that I'm reading this story of Paul and the shipwreck, and he's the prisoner; he could have just said, "I'm a prisoner, man. I'm not workin'." Or, "You guys go get it. I got you here safely. I'm cooked. I'm tired." But he doesn't. He just begins to serve. And leaders lead by example. Watching Paul tells me he lived what he taught.

Those of you that remember the 60's and 70's at Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, where I spent several years, there was a fellow there named Romaine. And Romaine was Chuck's kind of right-hand man, but he was a gruff kind of.....he was an ex-Marine, and he would just get in your face. You either loved him or you hated him. And yet, on Thursday mornings when he taught, a thousand people would come to listen to him. But I think they were drawn by the appeal of his whole personality - it was just crazy. He didn't want an office because he didn't want to sit in an office; he figured he'd just be around. People'd come to him for counseling, and he'd say stuff like, "Were you in church Sunday? Did you listen? Well, go listen to it!" And then he'd walk away, just leave you standing there. You know? (Laughing) We had him come out here and talk to our elders a couple times, and a couple of our guys went, "I don't like him." Well nobody liked him, but he said exactly what needed to be said. In fact, Chuck would do this (Pastor Jack crosses his arms and nods). He would have to be the.....you know, bad cop-good cop? He was the bad cop. And Romaine would say everything Chuck thought, and he was great. And he spent

years there before he passed away. But one of the stories I always remember about Romaine is we'd go to pastors' conferences when there were only a couple hundred (now the pastors' conferences have a thousand guys), and we'd go (even when I was at Calvary Downey working on staff there) and play baseball with these guys. And we'd always go. We had this conference for a week, and we'd all show up. Romaine, being the guy he is, he'd leave trash laying everywhere, and then he'd stay at the front of the church like this, and he'd watch us walk by trash. And then he'd get up to pray to open, and he'd go, "Yeah, hey you holy guys, too big of a deal to pick up trash. I saw you walkin' by trash, I saw you steppin' right on the trash, and you, I couldn't even believe it, you went around it as if you saw it!" And he would just call you out. You hated him (Laughing) but you loved him because he was absolutely right. But he would call on us big-shot-pastors-to-be to be godly people in terms of behavior. And he well, there're a hundred stories. If you ever hear a Romaine story, I'll just tell you it's probably true because he did some pretty outlandish things to get his point across.

But here's Paul - the guy on trial for having done nothing, who's been in jail for two years, who should easily have developed a chip on his shoulder, and he has none. He's just wantin' to serve. He's gotten everyone there. He's broken up a group that was going to defect and leave us to be. He's passed the Lord's Word along. He spent two weeks in the hold. He hadn't eaten in two weeks. And he's just out there, "Let me get some wood," and out he goes. No task.....he was not too big for a small task. Maybe we'll put it that way. He was just a guy.....he couldn't have just sat and waited. Paul the leader and Paul the prisoner - same guy - serving others. It is always tragic when you see people who see tasks as beneath them. Right? Like, "Oh, I used to do that. I don't do that anymore." And they just kind of look down at you. We've had people sometimes (not recently) come and say, "Well, I'd like to come to the church and just kind of serve. Can I come and serve?" And I go, "All right. You can come to church." And then they come during the day, and they, "What do you want me to do?" And I go, "Well, weed that planter over there." "Oh. Maybe you don't understand. I'm here to serve." "Yeah. The planter could use some serving." "I don't want to pull weeds. I don't do that." "Maybe you can take this and blow off the parking lot." "Oh, no. No. I got a bad back. I can't do that." "Well what do you want to do?" "I'd like to teach Wednesday night." "No! You can't. I'm doin' that." (Laughing) Crazy ideas. It's just serving is like..... "I've got a little thing right here. This is what I do right in here. That's about it." I like Paul. Paul could have.....he couldn't at the time because, "I wrote half the Bible, maybe you could just leave me alone.....you go get

some wood." But he couldn't do it. The most minimal task was important to him. And it's terrible when you grow away from ministry, when you lose your servant's heart, what you used to have but now it isn't anymore. In the 70's, I was in charge of producing some pretty large concerts. We'd rent out the Anaheim Convention Center - we'd bring bands in. And bands you'd probably know if we'd name them for you, but we won't. But there were several bands who came in with their noses very high in the air. And they're there to preach the gospel and play music for Jesus, and they'd say things like, "Well, yeah, our attorney's gonna call and what we'd like is we'd like this kind of water in our dressing room. We're gonna need at least two phone lines. We need this, and we need that." And they start telling you all the stuff they need. To which I replied, "Yeah, you can go play somewhere else." And they go, "Well, do you know who I am?" "Yeah, I don't know who you are. Apparently you know who you are. We just need people to come serve. We'll take care of you. Don't worry. We'll feed you." "Oh, no," and they'd walk out the door. And good riddance, I thought. We took them off the list. You've gotta be willing to come serve. We have people that call here sometimes, and they'll say, "Well, I'm a musician, I'd like to come play for your people." "Oh, great. Send us a tape or something or a CD." And they'll say, "Well, how many people come?" and we'll tell them. "How much will you pay me?" And I said, "Well I don't know. Are you any good? Any references?" But they wanted to work out the money thing, and I'm thinking, "Hey, do you just want to come serve, or do you want to come for a job? Because we're not hiring anybody." But we love people that want to come and serve and use their gifts. You want to come do that, we'll make sure you're taken care of. But you're just going to have to trust us. "Oh, that's not gonna work for me." "All right. We'll get someone else to gather wood." And that's what we did.

So, Paul had what you needed - a servant mentality and a servant's heart. And he would stoop to any level for the joy of serving the Lord. What do you read in Mark 10:45? It says, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." You want to be like Jesus? Go serve, man. Go serve. He keeps good track of what you're doing. If you want me to keep track, He won't. You want to hear me applaud, He doesn't have to write it down. You want a reward from me, you're not gonna get one from Him. Because that's just the way God works. He wants it to be for Him. And Paul is a great example. Everywhere I read - even when Paul should be upset and complaining and had enough and maybe worse, rebelling - all you find is this godly man who wants to serve the Lord. So he's out gathering wood. "Let's get these 275 other people all together and get them dry."

One of the last things Jesus did at the last supper was to gather these people together and bind up His robe and get a bucket of water and begin to wash feet. Not exactly what you'd ask the Messiah to do. "Lord, You sit down, we'll wash Your feet." "No, no, no. You let Me do this." And then He said, when He was finished (John 13:12-17), "Do you know what I've done to you? I'm your Teacher. I've washed your feet. Now wash one another's feet. I've given you an example that you should do as I've done. A servant's not greater than his master or He that is sent greater than He who sent Him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."

So you want to be great in the kingdom? Be a servant. Not everyone's going to appreciate you or even notice what you're doing. And I would say of all of these folks that came last Thursday as we had our meeting together, there're a lot of ministries here that you know nothing about and that you may never know unless you happen to get involved with one. Because these folks work kind of below the radar, you know? You don't see them on the stage, they're not singin', they don't have a guitar or a microphone. So they kind of come and go. But, man, great will be their reward in heaven because that's the way the Lord judges things.

And I think, in our narrative, Paul is such a good example of a guy that is the greatest in the kingdom becoming the servant of all. It's not an easy lesson for your flesh to learn because we want everyone to know what we've done and the price that we've paid and the effort that we've put out. "Oh, I was there all day." And we can do that kind of almost conspicuously. I had a guy - he used to come to church here so I can just tell you now because I don't think I see him anywhere - but he used to say this, "Hey, bro, I was up at 3:00 this morning praying for you," which is kind of a back-handed way of saying, "Did you know that I was up at 3:00 in the morning prayin'?" So I'd say this, "Guy, why do you get up so early?" (Pastor Jack laughs) Kind of diffused the whole thing, you know? "Yeah, I was up at 3:00 a.m. praying." "Well, good for you. How 'bout next time you just tell me you're praying for me? I don't really need to know your great sacrifice. The Lord knows that already."

So, out goes Paul being that example. And then, of course, he gets bit by a snake. Right? I mean, is there anything else that could go wrong?! And I thought about that today. You know, Satan's attacks are usually upon people that are serving. And in the midst of your serving, that's when the enemy comes. If you want to have an easy life of it as far as temptation, just don't do anything. But if you want

to step out and serve the Lord, you can expect some opposition. I can't begin to tell you how often I'll hear people that go, "I'm gonna start going to church on Wednesday nights," and for the next month every Wednesday night, "Well, yeah, I gotta stay late, car breaks down, crash on the freeway, can't get there anyway." Because the minute you make that commitment, then the enemy goes, "No, I don't want that." Same thing with serving. The minute you start serving, everything goes wrong. And I thought here's Paul gettin' up, goin' to serve, and here comes the enemy. Doesn't attack a sitter but a doer. Right? And yet God would use this attack for good; would give Paul a very credible position in the eyes of the people. But Satan, he comes with evil intent. "Dear God, can I have a snake bite Paul?" And the Lord goes, "Hmm, hmm, yeah, that'd be a good idea." Satan, "All right, I'm gonna hurt somebody," and the Lord goes, "You don't know what you're up to!" And God will use that. So, Satan wants to destroy, but God has a plan even when you're goin' through it.

Notice, in verse 4, that "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.'" Here's the pagan way of thinking, the idolater way of thinking. "This man is not only a prisoner, he's done a violent thing. Probably a murderer. He's escaped the sea," literally, in their understanding, "he's escaped from Neptune, but now he's been dealt by justice." The word "justice" is the word "*dike*" which is goddess of judgment, the daughter of Jupiter. So in their minds, "Yeah, he escaped one god only to face another god; the gods are gonna get him. He's getting what he deserves." But notice that even the heathens' view of sin is that it should be punished, which is interesting. God has given to us the ability to know right from wrong; eventually we talked about it on Sunday a couple of weeks ago how our conscience lets light in, and it allows us to see things as they should be. In fact, one of God's judgments in Romans 1:18 was that "His wrath would be revealed from heaven against ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in their unrighteousness, though they know it, God has shown it to them." They're aware of what God wants because God made us with that sensibility. But even in that kind of a place, there is the knowledge of right and wrong and sin. And so here's a bunch of heathen who worship false gods and have lots of weird Greek and Roman kind of idolatrous ideas, but they still come to the conclusion, "This guy's done somethin' bad. He deserves what he's gonna get." That's what happened. There's a payment schedule here with God.

Paul, verse 5, too busy to really stop and deal with it, "shook off the creature into the fire" (animal cruelty, apparently) "and suffered no harm." So he doesn't shake him; he just shakes the thing off. By the way, this is the proper application of Mark 16:18 which says if you take up serpents, they will by no means hurt you. It doesn't say you should have a service and dance around with a snake and hope you're going to live to survive because that's your faith. That's tempting God. This just happened in the service of the Lord. So Paul just shakes the thing off, no big deal, throw it in the fire. "However," verse 6, "they" (these natives) "were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead," have a heart attack. "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." First he's being judged by the gods, now he is a god. He changed their minds. Don't you think crowd adulation is a fickle thing? Ask any sports athlete who had a bad year and how the people cheer your name one year, they buy your jersey, and the next year you're a bum. Or the actor who's had a bad movie bomb. I think it is better to have the Lord's approval than the crowds', don't you? This happened years earlier with Paul in Lystra, you remember, that when he refused their worship to be honored as a god, then they wanted to stone him and leave him for dead. People change very quickly, which is why I'd rather seek to please the Lord than please men. Here God would use this miracle, like I said, to establish Paul in the eyes of the Maltese people. He was a man of God that could be trusted. It set him apart, if you will, with the power of God confirming the Word of God.

So verse 7 tells us, "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." So, as God would have it, they didn't just crash on the side of the island, they crashed at a place where the richest guy in town lived. The word "Publius" means popular, and I would guess a guy with a lot of stuff would be popular; especially on an island where people didn't have much. So, for three days, 276 people made his little mansion area home. He was courteous to them. Notice, again, the courteousness of an unbeliever doesn't go unnoticed by the Lord; He takes note of it. As they are there, this kind man, whose name is "popular," his dad was very sick. Now, if you go to the history and look backwards in Malta, there was a fever that gripped the island for years called

Malta fever, and they eventually discovered it was a bacterial infection that came from goat's milk. It was discovered in the late 1800's, but it plagued the island for centuries. And it is, at least Bible scholars think that maybe that's something he was already dealing with. The prognosis in Paul's day (until 1860) was that it was deadly; you had it, you didn't get well. There was really no way out - they didn't know what it was. So God graciously heals this man who had graciously opened his heart and his home to the many that were hurting. Paul now gets a national audience; everyone wants help. And now the natives come running with family and friends, and Paul's ministry begins, and he becomes the guy that everyone wants to talk to and, "Pray for me," and, "Lay your hands upon me," and, "I don't feel good either." Man, how the Lord uses you in the most interesting places.

It interests me that Paul, while he was ministering to these folks on the island, had a thorn in the flesh which the Lord said He wouldn't heal. So here's an older guy, in his 60's probably, now on his way to Rome; been in prison for a couple years, gonna be in prison at least two more before he beats the rap and he gets out before (eighteen more months) he's murdered. But here's a guy that has had a great fleshly trial. Most Bible scholars believe it was his eye disease, that he had bulging eyes, that he had a very hard time seeing. It made him kind of grotesque to look at. Paul prayed for it to be healed. God said His strength would be made perfect in Paul's weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). Paul went, "Great, as long as You're strong in me." And yet here's a guy that has all kinds of needs for himself, and yet God uses him to pray for others to be healed. And I only bring that up because so often we think, "As soon as I get my life together, then the Lord's gonna use me. As soon as I get all that I need lined up, then I'm gonna go start servin' the Lord." But you don't find anybody like that in the Bible. You find people God uses in the midst of their own tragedies and difficulties and hardships. If you want to wait until you're perfect before the Lord will use you, it'll just be about a day too late. Paul sees, for the first time maybe, the reason for the storm, though. He's got people comin', and he's preachin' to folks, and God is laying out for Paul - here's an island with a people who have open hearts, and they get to hear about His Son. And there was no way that Paul would have come here on his own. No way. He wouldn't have said, "You know, could we land over there, a little side trip?" There's no way that he would have come here, but here he is.

Which brings me to this thought, and I want you to think about it. Sometimes God uses very disruptive means in your life to get you where He wants you to be, places you would never go otherwise. The people that you would never find anywhere else.

And I have to believe that, just looking over my own life, there are times when I end up in places that I wouldn't have chosen to go, but it turns out to be great ministry opportunities. You know? And the Lord just kind of directs in a way that has to do with disruption. We like, you and I, pattern, I think. We like structure, we like routine, we like settling in. I know lots of families that you can tell what day it is by what they're having for dinner. "On Tuesday we have this, on Wednesday we have that." And if you ever try....."Oh, no, no, no. We don't do that on Thursday." We had a couple with us on a missions trip years ago. Every week they had a set deal, and they couldn't find a couple of the meals that they wanted, and they were all upset. All right. You're just not gonna be able to eat tonight. But we love the order, right? You all pretty much sit in the same place every week. All of you, almost. If you're not here, I know. (Laughing) Fool me. Move around. And it's like "If I don't get" and I see people counting, "One, two, three, four, five, six. That's my row. Do do do do. That's my row." And if you have to move because someone's in your row, oh, it's not good. "I didn't like where I was sitting tonight. The light wasn't good, the air was too much, I couldn't see very good, there was a problem." It's always somethin'. Routine. So if the Lord disrupts your life, we hate it. But I think we would do well to just kind of go to bed and in the morning, before you get out of bed, just say to the Lord, "Look, whatever it takes, I don't want to miss Your best. Interrupt me as much as You want." And then get out of bed. And ask the Lord to just make sure that you don't miss His plan. Because routine is usually counterproductive to what God wants to do if it's something different because change annoys us. We don't like change. Right? We don't like disturbance. We want things to just go the way we intend. But God may, to get you to the job He wants you to be, have you get fired after fifteen years; and you're going home, goin', "Where's the Lord? I've always been faithful." (Pastor Jack speaks in a whining tone.) You don't realize at all what God's doing. Later you can look back and go, "Oh, that was the Lord." It's a little late then. You want to be able to see it while you're goin' through it. God has a better job. You'd have never quit, you'd have never looked - except for the disruption. And it seems to me, even in these narratives, that disruption is a necessary tool in God's hands so that He can get us to where He wants us to be. It's an interesting concept. But I think if you'll watch, you'll see it to be so.

We were at a dinner with a bunch of folks last night (for my wife's birthday), and there was a salad bar, and we were all kind of going through. I don't know what got me there later than everybody else, but there was a woman that just looked panicked, and I said, "What's wrong?" And she said, "I don't know what to eat." I

said, "Well, you can eat anything that's there," being as helpful as I could be. (Laughing) And she said, "I have terrible diabetes, and sometimes I can't" and she started giving me the whole story. And I said, "Can I just pray for you?" and we prayed right there in the salad bowl line. (Laughing) I don't know. But I just figured the Lord brought her there. You know? I have no idea what her name is. I couldn't pick her out of a line-up, probably, if you asked me tonight. But I figured the Lord had me to talk to her. I think if you run around with a willingness to get interrupted.....not like, "Oh, it's 8:30. We've gotta leave. I've gotta be in bed by 9:06 or if I'm not in bed, then I'm not gonna be able to sleep." Well, just lighten up a little! Hang around for a couple minutes. "Hey, Lord, anything you want me to do before I get back on my schedule?" Man, I'm tellin' ya, it can be a big deal. And it certainly is here with Paul's life. He wouldn't have done any of this. Right? He wouldn't have done any of it. But Paul now gets to see the purpose of God in the storm, and the islanders come, and they line up at the door. And I would just say pray for a willingness to let God disrupt your plans. "Oh, I got a flat tire." Yeah, why? "Well, cuz God doesn't love me" (Pastor Jack speaks in a whining tone). Really? That's it. You're gonna trust Him for eternity, but tires He can't be in charge.

Look how faithfully and fruitfully Paul has come through this storm. Everything he faced - the two years in prison, the accusations that weren't true, the unknowns that were waiting for him in Rome - and the guy is just as solid as a rock. Right? You don't see him wondering if his faith is destroyed. He's not complaining or questioning God's goodness. He's not thinking of quitting or walking away from the Lord. He leads everyone on a boat through the depths of despair. He focuses on God's Word. He delivers God's message. He becomes God's vessel through whom healing would come, and direction. He's an amazing guy. "Though He slay me, yet I will trust in Him." That's what we read in Job 13:15. How far will you trust the Lord? How long before you stop feeling good about what God's doing in the midst of the storm? Paul survived it all.

And then we read, in verse 10 - and, by the way, verse 10, nothing else is said of what happened except verse 11 tells us it's been three months they were there; this is all that we know about three months, all we're told, verse 10 - that "when we left, they provided all of the things that we needed to continue on, on our journey."

So, verse 11, "After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island. And landing

at Syracuse, we stayed three days." So when it was time to leave the island that had heard of Jesus, that had fallen in love with Paul..... and, by the way, let me say this about how little we know about this three-month stop: never in Paul's ministry in the book of Acts had Paul been so well-received in one place. Never. Usually there was an initial convert kind of group and then a building group of opposition. It always ended, almost always, with persecution or riot or run for your life or beating or imprisonment. And yet, for three months, he was there, and, man, it couldn't have gone better. They loved every minute of his time there. Little, if no, opposition at all. And when they left, they were laden down with grateful kinds of provisions. So the centurion, verse 11, finds another ship that had pulled into port from Egypt; the other one, remember, sank. This one has a masthead of the faces of Castor and Pollux, the Gemini twins, the mythological sons of Jupiter, considered patron gods of navigation. I'm sure that Luke wrote this with kind of a smile on his face. "Oh, yeah, and then we got into the boat that had the Greek gods of navigation." I'm sure he was laughing to himself else why would he tell us this. "This is the boat that they got on, the mythological sons of Jupiter who are going to protect us." What a joke.

One day, verse 12, they went to Syracuse in Sicily for three days; unloaded the cargo. The next day we're told, in verse 13, "From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli, where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days. And so we went toward Rome." So, a couple of days they ended up in Puteoli, which is called Pozzuoli today. It's still there, it's near Naples, it's near where the Appian Way starts on the way to Rome. So they sailed the 200 miles in three days. Now they would start a 150-mile walk to get to Rome. The old city of Puteoli is still in Italy, if you happen to be going on vacation there this summer. The marketplace is there, the harbor, the docks. Julius appears to, again, have a week of work here. Paul was, again, allowed to go visit some believers. And then, verse 14 at the end, they headed out for Rome.

Then we read, verse 15, these words, "And from there, when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage. Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him." So, verse 15, to Paul's surprise and great encouragement, when people heard that he'd landed here - now he'd never been here, he wasn't involved in the church plant though he knew

plenty of folks here - they began to come out of Rome to greet Paul at the harbor, 150 miles away. But they came, they first found him at the Appii Forum; we put it on the map. That's 43 miles outside of Rome. He then met others at a place called Three Inns, which was 33 miles out. And I want you to notice, especially there at the end, in verse 15, that Paul, the great leader, thanked God and was encouraged by the fellowship of the saints. You know, the guy that you would think doesn't need any encouragement, at least in reading all of this, he couldn't have been happier finding some Christians who were there for him and with him, encouraging him, loving him, supporting him. This was far more saint support than Paul had gotten ever in Jerusalem or that he'd gotten in two years in Caesarea. These were folks far-removed and yet greatly supportive, and would be over the years. Notice, in verse 16, that Paul, as a Roman citizen who is appealing his case, would be given the privilege of having his own house to stay in. He'd have to pay for it, or someone would have to help. He would live with only one soldier attached to him. Verse 30 will tell you (and we will do that next week) that Paul spent two years in his own rented house. He was able to get as many visitors as he liked. But, for two years, every day there was a guard, 24 hours a day, stuck to his arm or stuck to his leg, which is why you, I think, will read later on in Philippians 4:22 that there were a lot of people from Caesar's household that had gotten saved while Paul was in Rome. So I think the Lord just started sending them one guy to get saved, "Okay, next;" he'd go on vacation, send the next guy in, and for two years Paul was just having his own church service every day in his own house. So, it's gonna be pretty good.

So, next week, the end of the book of Acts, the last words that Luke records. And then we'll have Don Stewart come out and answer some questions one Wednesday. I hope you'll enjoy that. Bring all your questions. Bring hard ones. Set him up. Let's go after him. (Laughing) He and I have the best time. I think I've known him 40 years now. But I think we should go after him. And then the Wednesday after that, he will be here to just go through all of the recent news stories and how they relate to Bible prophecy in our waiting for the Lord to come for the church. And there're some really cool things going on that I think, as you lay them next to the Scriptures, could be very encouraging. We're going to be, after that, in Israel for two weeks. We're taking eighty-one people from church. So that's a lot of folks, right? (Clapping) Well I don't know if we want to applaud that because that's a lot of work, but..... (Pastor Jack claps) yay for eighty-one people. And then, when we get back, we're going to start the book of Ruth and go Ruth and Samuel and Chronicles and Kings. We're going to finish all of the rest of the historic books of

the Old Testament on Wednesday nights, without interruption. Okay? So that'll be our plan for February and March (Pastor Jack laughs) until next year February and March.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
February 10, 2019