

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Last Lap

Scripture: Acts 28:1-16

Code: 1801

If you will, take your Bible turn with us to Acts chapter 28. We're really reaching the conclusion of a marvelous time in the book of Acts which is kind of the end of the long two year study or more.

They told me in the tape room that if I preached this sermon and finished next week there will be a hundred and three sermons in the book of Acts. So, we've just barely scratched the surface. We may do it again, do a hundred more sometime. I've entitled the message, The Last Lap. And we find in this particular portion from 28:1 to 16 Paul's arrival at Rome. And really we have to admit that this is a very climatic passage. For a long time, for many months we've been trying to get Paul to Rome, haven't we? And finally he's going to arrive. A long dream is going to be fulfilled. It's been years since the desire first entered his mind to go to Rome and now it is fulfilled. And it's exciting to read at the very end of verse 14, "And so we came to Rome." At the very beginning of verse 16, "And so we came to Rome."

I think Luke repeats it twice because it's so wonderful that it finally happened. It's a climax that's hard to imagine and the response and the reaction of Paul at this point is just left to mystery because we don't really know what's going on in his heart but it will be interesting to find out as we get through the passage, something of the things that he faced in finally arriving at Rome. I wish we had some monitor on his attitudes when he finally saw this dream fulfilled. Maybe something of the spirit of this occasion could be found in Psalm 107, which declares that God created both the storm and the calm. And then the Psalmist says, "So He bringeth them under the haven of their desire." God is in the business of fulfilling desires. I think one of the greatest frustrations that people face in the world is the frustration of realizing that most all of their dreams are unfulfilled or unfulfilling. Now then I think Solomon had it right in Ecclesiastes, you know the word from the preacher on human wisdom when he said, "Man looks out on everything and all is vanity." He talks about the frustration of a man never realizing his greatest dreams and highest ambition. But that's only the frustration of humanity because God is in the business of fulfilling dreams. God is in the business of maximizing anticipation into reality. The Psalmist said in Psalm 37:4, "Delight in the Lord and He'll give you what? "The desires of your heart." He'll plant them there and then He'll fulfill them. That God is definitely in the business of fulfilling desires. There needs to be no frustration in the life of a believer.

No sense of unfulfilled meaning. In Psalm 21:1 and 2 it says, "The king shall joy in Thy strength, O Lord, and in Thy salvation how great shall he rejoice Thou hast given him his heart's desire and hast not withheld the request of his lips." Here again is the indication in David's life and there are probably

Messianic overtones in the passage as well that God does fulfill dreams and ambitions and hopes. In Psalm 145 also, verse 19 says, "He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him." When a man puts himself in the right perspective with God, God will fulfill that man's desires. I suppose the worse case of frustration that I ever ran across in a situation of unfulfilled desire was when I was asked to visit a hospital in Glendale and somebody said to me there's a young boy there who needs help and he needs to see somebody, will you go and see him? And I said, - Sure, and I went to the hospital and I saw a boy lying on a bed, I didn't really know anything about him except it appeared from the sheet that was over him that he didn't have legs that were very long. And that he was obviously very crippled.

So I began to talk with him and I said, - What happened? Well, he said I jumped off the gymnasium roof at Glendale High School at lunch time.

And he jammed his legs right up into his body and he's crippled the rest of his life. And I said, - Why did you do that? He said because my girlfriend dated somebody else. Well it turned out as I probed into this story that this so-called girlfriend was somebody he dated one time. And he had been so turned down by everybody in his world that all of his life was nothing but frustration so he tried to kill himself. But you know, that's kind of how the world is. You set up a lot of dreams and they never materialize, they never happen. And that's just exactly where God moves in and God plants desires in the hearts of those who fear Him and meets those desires in fulfillment.

And we see that in this passage. You just can't miss it as Paul arrives at Rome and has the fulfillment of that desire that's lingered in his breast for years.

Now in looking at this passage again I want to draw some principles out of it. Our last study was about the faithful leader, wasn't it?

Chapter 27 we saw all the qualities of a faithful leader. Now here in this passage we're going to see the blessing of a faithful God on a faithful leader. I gave you last time about ten qualities of a faithful leader that were exhibited by Paul in the account of the shipwreck. And now I want to show you some of the things that God did in blessing a man who feared Him. And blessing a man who was a faithful man. And so the trip to Rome is a tremendously rich narrative because it not only gives us principles of leadership but it gives us the principles on which God blesses faithful leadership. So we come to the last lap.

Now the last lap in chapter 28,1 to 10 is from Malta or Melita--today's modern name is Malta. From Malta to Rome. The journey has already lasted two and a half months at least for fourteen days they have fought the wind and the sea against the treachery of Euroclydon, which is a nor'easter hurricane. They have no hope to be saved in the middle of the hurricane. They can't navigate because there are no stars visible and there's no sun visible in the terrible storm. But God has

somehow controlled the hurricane and if you'll notice your map again, you can see as we've seen in the last couple of weeks that God controlled the hurricane blowing out of the Northeast and allowed it to drive them rather than getting stuck in the Greater Syrtis and being destroyed, it drove them actually somewhat Northwest to the island of Malta.

And you'll remember that when they finally arrived at Malta not having any idea where they were or how they got there, they stuck the bow of the ship into the sand and the waves began to beat the stern and it began to disintegrate. The soldiers became afraid, pulled out their swords and decided to butcher all the prisoners so they wouldn't swim away and escape. And the soldiers would then be held responsible. The centurion Julius prevented the soldiers from doing that and then all 276 people on the ship that was breaking up in the hurricane on the coast of Malta dove into the water some swimming through the hurricane surf and others hanging to boards and debris and all of them made it to shore. And we remember that God had said the ship would be lost, everybody on it would be saved and you would land on an island. And everything that God said came to pass. And you can imagine that having been told that by the Apostle Paul when they arrived on that island they began to think seriously about what he had said and about the credibility of this man Paul and the God he claimed was ruling in the world.

Now as we arrive on the island we find them all soaking wet in a torrential rain just having managed to escape with their lives through a hurricane surf. The wind is blowing in that kind of situation, so hard that it is turning the raindrops into darts. And there they are beached on a place where they can't even identify. Now at that point we pick up the story in chapter 28.

Now I just want to follow that little outline that you have on the backside of the map and I just gave you some points there so you can kind of follow the narrative. The first thing we see is the pagan hospitality. We'll go through the narrative then come back to the points on God's blessing on the faithful man. The first thing we see is pagan hospitality and this is a most fascinating thing. Just a little note; one of the great virtues of Christianity is hospitality. Hospitality is to be the characteristic of a godly man according to 1 Timothy and Titus, the characteristic of an elder, a leader in the church. But beyond that hospitality is to be characteristic of all Christians according to 1 Peter 4:9. You'll remember that we're to be careful how we treat strangers because in Hebrews 13:2 it says, some people entertain angels unaware. And that goes back to Genesis 18 when Abraham and Sarah put on a nice dinner for some people that turned out to be God and two angels, so be careful about hospitality. That's a very important area. Christians are to extend themselves in kindness toward strangers. Our homes are to be open, our lives are to be available and open to meet the needs of strangers. In Matthew 10:40 Jesus said, "He that receiveth you receiveth Me and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him who sent Me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward, he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever shall give to drink to one of these little ones, a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple verily I say unto you he shall in no way lose his reward." In other

words, He says, When you men go out and preach and reach people, their hospitality toward you is going to result in the blessing of God. God has always put a high price on hospitality, on kindness, on gentleness, goodness toward strangers. And this is definitely to be part of the Christian lives and testimonies.

In fact, when Jesus sent out the twelve in Luke 10, He said, "Whatever house you enter into, abide and then leave later. Whoever will not receive you when you go out of that city shake off the very dust from your feet for a testimony against them." A lack of hospitality at that point resulted in treating people as if they were Gentiles which was about the worse thing you could do to a Jew. So God was very serious about this whole dimension of hospitality. In Romans, chapter 12 and verse 13, it says, "Distributing to the necessity of saints given to hospitality And these are all the exhortations for Christians. We are to be given to hospitality. We are to have a proclivity for love to strangers.

Well, you know, when you really look at this thing, very often we're outdone by the world, very often our lives aren't as open as they ought to be and maybe it's because our lives aren't what they ought to be and we're afraid to open them up. But hospitality is to be characteristic of a believer.

Now in our passage in Acts 28 I want you to notice that hospitality here is characteristic of these pagans. They land on the island of Malta and the Maltese people are extremely hospitable. Look at verse 1: "And when they were escaped then they knew that the island was called Malta."

It was soon after they had landed there when they were ashore when they realized they were on Malta. The reason they didn't recognize it when they arrived was because they came by way of a little bay now known as St. Paul's Bay which was not the normal port. The normal port was a place called Valletta, V-a-l-l-e-t-t-a, and this was not Valletta. The sailors and the soldiers had probably been to Malta before but wouldn't have recognized this part of the island. It wouldn't have taken them very long, however, since it was an island only seventeen miles long and ten miles wide. It's topography would have been fairly consistent all around and they would have recognized certain features of Malta that they were acquainted with and drawn the conclusion that this was indeed that place. And, perhaps there was some local people who informed them of the place as well. Now the name, Melita as it is in the Authorized, or Malta as we know it, is the name that was first given to the island by the ancient Phoenicians. The Phoenicians were really from the coastline of Palestine and they were the great navigators of ancient times.

They were the great mariners. They were the ones who pretty much charted the courses of the Mediterrean. And the Phoenician sailors had come here and named this Malta or Melita. That is the Phoenician word for "refuge" or "escape," either one. And they found it to be just that. It is sixty miles as you can notice there, about sixty miles off the south tip of Sicily. Now since about 1800 it has been pretty much dominated by the British and today, English is pretty much the common language but native Maltese is Arabic, a form of Arabic which indicates that the Maltese island was established by

people from the Arab world or from the Orient or from the East and indeed we believe they were the Phoenicians. And there's probably a little play on words in the Greek since the name of the island is refuge or escape it could be that what is being said by Luke is - When we had escaped we knew that the island was called escape.

Or when we had found refuge we knew why the island was called refuge.

Verse 2: "And the barbarous people"; and that's a terribly unkind thing to say about the Maltese, "But the barbarous people showed us no little kindness for they kindled a fire and received us every one because of the present rain and because of the cold." It's mid November, folks or early November and it's biting cold in a hurricane and to be soaking wet and exposed to the wind and so the natives came out and they prepare for them a fire. Now when you're going to make a fire for 276 people to get them warm, that's some kind of fire. So they had a real bonfire.

Just--I want to back off of that word "barbarous people" a little bit.

It's too bad that the Authorized version is so unkind to the wonderful Maltese people by giving them this concept of barbarous, you think of a bunch of people in loin cloths with bones through their nose but that is not the case. The word barbaros in the Greek was a word the Greeks used to refer to anybody who spoke a language foreign to them and did not speak Greek. All it means is they were natives of Malta who spoke a foreign language. The best term that would be used would be the native of the island. And the natives of the island showed us no little kindness It is not a derogatory term, it is not a term that has to do with aboriginal behavior and culture it is simply a term that the Greek used to speak of those who didn't speak Greek. So the native Maltese welcomed two-hundred and seventy-six soaked, cold, shivering, exhausted visitors. I want to show you something interesting here. I just want to give you a little theology. You know, God always notes kindnesses in Scripture even by pagan people. And I just read you some Scriptures, didn't I, about how that God even said He would be kind and He would bless those who treated the disciples and treated the seventy who were sent out, well. We just read a couple of passages in Matthew and Luke.

God always notes those who are kind to His own. You go all the way back to Genesis 12 and you have the first statement to that regard. Where God says Abraham is going to be the father of a great nation and then He says I will bless them that what? That bless you and I will curse him that curses you. How the world treats the people of God is a primary concern in God's mind in terms of blessing. You know, when you get into Matthew 24 and 25 you find that the judgment of the sheep and the goats is determined on how nations treated whom? Israel. The attitude the disciples were to have toward homes as they traveled around was whether or not they were kind and hospitable to them. God has always noted the kindness of the pagan world toward His own. And it has been that there has been kindnesses given by men and God in turn has given blessing to them. And I think one of the reasons so many wonderful things happened here at Malta was because of those people being so

openly kind to those strangers. And in a minute I'll show you all those things that happened on that island and it was amazing the things that happened there to those people. It says in verse 2 that they showed us no little kindness. What it means it was not an ordinary kindness it was an extraordinary kindness, beyond normal kindness. Now this to me is extremely interesting. We talk a lot about, I think, you know, in conservative, fundamental theology, we talk a lot about the depravity of man, you know? We talk about the fact that men without Jesus Christ are totally sinful and totally depraved and etc. etc. and that is true. But you know, it's an interesting thing that even within a pagan culture not exposed to the truth there is something in a man call it if you will the milk of human kindness or whatever, that makes him do kind deeds in time of need. A classic illustration has to be Luke 10, "And Jesus answering said," in verse 30, "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho"--and that is down, believe me. "He fell among thieves who stripped him of his raiment, wounded and departed leaving him half dead and by chance there came down a certain priest that way and when he saw him he passed by the other side," There was a Jewish priest and he saw the Samaritan there bleeding, half dead and he walked on the other side of the road, didn't want to contaminate himself by touching a Samaritan. "And likewise a Levite when he was at the place came and looked on him and passed by on the other side." I should say it was a certain man not a Samaritan.

"Then the Samaritan came", verse 33, "As he journeyed, came where he was and when he saw him he had compassion on him." And here is an outcast having compassion on this man. "He went to him, bound his wounds, poured in oils and wines and set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn took care of him. Next day when he departed he took out two denarii and gave them to the host and said, Take care of him, whatever thou spendest more when I come again I will repay thee. Which now of these three thinkest now was neighbor unto him that fell among thieves and said, he that showed mercy on him?" "Then said Jesus unto him, Go and do thou likewise." Here again, our Lord states a story of a man who is not particularly a Christian man, that isn't the point, the point is here is a man who extends goodness. And all I want to draw from this is the fact that within the heart of men, even pagan men there is a capacity to do things which are good. You know, some of the greatest philanthropist in the history of the world have been non-Christians. And you say, - What is the point? The point is Romans chapter 2 and I want to draw this conclusion, verses 14, 15 and 27. Listen to this; Romans 2:14, "For when the Gentiles", that is the heathen, "Who have not the law", they do not have the Mosaic covenant, "Do by nature the things contained in the Law these having not the Law are a Law unto themselves." Watch. "Who show the work of the Law written in their hearts", you see? The activity of the people on Malta is a classic illustration of the internal revelation of God to the pagan. Even the individual without a knowledge of Jesus Christ, without a knowledge of Mosaic Law which says to love your neighbor as yourself, in essence, even a man without all of that has the sense within him of what is right to do in a time of stress. Where does he get that sense? He gets it because the Law of God is written in his heart.

His conscience bears witness. Verse 27 says, "And shall not the uncircumcision", that is the pagans, non-Jews, the heathen, "Which is by nature if it fulfill the Law judge you who by the letter and

circumcision transgress the Law?" In other words, the pagan who obeys the Law inside is better off than you who have the outside law and don't obey it. Now I only point all this out just to tell you that this is one of the great proofs of the inward knowledge of right meaning that God has revealed Himself to men. You know, people always say, - Well, what about the heathen? What about the heathen? How will they know? How will they tell? Believe me, folks, God has written His Law into their hearts, they have a sense of morality, they have a sense of kindness and love that is granted to them by God, they have a sense of right and wrong. And here to these strangers they have no little kindness, they go beyond what is normal kindness for the sake of these strangers. And they lit a bonfire large enough to warm 276- people, received everyone of them because of the rain and the cold.

Now let's go to verse 3 and see a second point in our outline, potential harm, potential harm. "And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks." Now I want to stop right there. You know, I read that this week and I thought - Now what is he doing getting a bundle of sticks?

A wood fire outside obviously a bonfire is going to go out without fresh fuel and they have on that island and had a certain wood that they call brush wood which was kind of a twiggy thing. And Paul is busy gathering brush wood. I mean, folks, this is amazing. The man never ceases to astound me. I keep reading about him and I just can't find any weaknesses in him. He is as anxious to do the little task of gathering sticks as he is the large ones of confronting Caesar. From his position as a prisoner on the ship and he may have been chained at the very time he is gathering the sticks, but from his position as a prisoner he is risen to rule the ship. We remember that, don't we? He's really been the guy telling everybody what to do and securing the whole situation. But now when they're on the shore and the situation changes really Paul is still the leader because he's the resource that all of them have. And by now his credibility is established. But when it comes time to gather the sticks he doesn't start giving orders to 275 others he just goes and gets the sticks himself. Well, you know, there's something exciting about a leader who is willing to do the very thing that is the menial humble task that usually doesn't belong to the leadership. Listen, the normal mentality of a leader is not to stoop to do the simple, humble, menial tasks that he expects everyone else to do, but I hasten to add, true spiritual leadership, true leadership stoops to that level. To do exactly what it expects of other people. And I think there's something significant just in the Holy Spirit telling us that he was gathering sticks. Fourteen days fighting a hurricane, fourteen days without food, he's just managed to swim through the hurricane surf to get to the shore, he's soaking wet, it's raining like mad, the wind is blowing at a terrible clip and here he is picking up sticks to fire a fire to warm the rest of the people. A true leader has a servant mentality and he never lost his perspective. He was always sacrificing, always sacrificing. Listen, Jesus said, "For the Son of man came not to be ministered unto but", what? "To minister and give His life a ransom for many." This is always a quality of true leadership. So we ought to add it to our study last week, true leadership includes the mentality of a servant, the eagerness to do the humble task as well as the exalted one. Humility is absolute to true spiritual leadership. Look at Jesus in John 13 washing the disciples feet and He says then to those eleven leaders or Judas, of

course, would not be included in the ultimate fulfillment but He says to them, "You do what I have done to you." In other words, you lead with a servant mentality, you stoop to meet the needs of each other. If you're too important to get dirty, if you're too important to wash feet, if you're too important to pick up sticks, you're not as important as you think you are. Unfortunately one of the sticks was alive. "He laid the sticks on the fire", and of course, the heat from the fire caused what happened. "There came a viper out of the heat and fastened on his hand." Now "viper" is a poisonous snake of a certain sort. It's interesting that in modern times there are no such snakes remaining on Malta. They have since ceased to exist there but they must have been there in some quantity because the people immediately recognized the snake and the severity of the bite but the stick came alive and it fastened itself its fangs into the hand of Paul. And he brought his hand out of the wood and there is this viper, this poisonous snake hanging from his hand by its fangs. The term for fastening on the hand is a term that is used in extra-Biblical literature particularly by a Greek physician by the name of Dioscorides to speak of poisonous matters invading the body. So we know it was a poisonous snake beginning to inject his venom into Paul's hand. Well of course, it seems a strange thing that all of a sudden he would die here bitten by a little, teeny, twig of a snake when he just managed to be protected from fourteen days of a hurricane. It would seem a little ridiculous to go through that whole routine and die on the beach from snakebite. So you face potential harm. But what happens? Verse 4, "And when the natives saw the beast" and the word beast there, *theerion*, is used to refer to venomous snakes.

In fact the antidote is called *theerioke*; it comes from the same root, the snakebite antidote. "Well when the beast, the venomous snake, was hanging on his hand and they said among themselves." Now the Maltese people looked at this snake hanging off his hand by its fangs and they began to talk to themselves. "They said among themselves", is in the imperfect tense which means repeatedly it fired through the crowd. What did they say? "Oh, no doubt this man is a murderer whom, though he hath escaped the sea yet justice alloweth not to live."

There's their theology. He's a murderer, no doubt about it. The words no doubt a very strong affirmation of their faith. I was reading a commentator, I think it was William Barclay, who said he didn't really feel this was a poisonous snake, he just felt it was a little, garter snake type and the teeth never got into the hand. Well, that's really kind of a funny view since in the next verse the people expected Paul to fall dead. Of course it was a poisonous snake. There's no need to explain away miracles, that's part of life for the apostle. It was a poisonous snake and the people said, he's a murderer and it's proven by what's happening to him, even though he escaped the sea, watch this, "justice alloweth not to live." If you have a Bible that has a small *j* at the word "justice," put a large one there. That's a capital name; that's a proper name. Justice is the name of a goddess, *dike--d-i-k-long e*.

This was the goddess that was personified as Justice. In fact the goddess Dike was the daughter of Zeus. You always see Zeus, you know, a great god, you know. I think he's the one with all the darts in his hand and the arrows in his hand, and war, and the wife--Zeus and his wife Themis. The daughter

of Zeus and Themis--and of course this is all mythology, was supposedly Dike, the goddess personified as Justice. And they say, Aha, the goddess is not so baffled, she may have been faked out at sea but that poisonous snake is going to bring justice on this evil. She found a new way to punish the murderer. It's interesting how the Greeks personified their gods but we do that in a sense. Do you know that even in America we have a goddess of justice? It's that woman with the blindfold on and the scales in her hand. That's nothing but a throw back to idolatry and the personification of a concept into a deity. And that's what the Greeks did. So they all expected Paul to fall dead as a victim of the goddess Dike. Now what is interesting about this, and I want to pursue it for just a quick second, is that again this illustrates to us that these pagan people, uninitiated in the gospel, uninformed about Christianity in any sense, having no idea of the revelation of God, no indication at all that there is a Jewish community there that they have sensitivity to these things at all. These pagans have a sense of right and wrong. These pagans have a sense of justice and a sense that sins get punished. They're saying, Aha, if he dies, look he must be a murderer. In other words, there is a right and a wrong and when you are wrong there are consequences, do you see? This is a sense of morality. You say - Where did they get that idea? Where did they ever come up with that? Listen, go back to Romans 1 again a couple of pages to the right and you're there. Romans 1, "The wrath of God", verse 18, "is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Why? "They hold the truth." In other words, God punishes men because they do know the truth. "That which may be known of God", verse 19, "is manifest in them for God hath shown it unto them." In the man's heart as we saw earlier, there is a sense of love, there is a sense of kindness. Here there is a sense of justice, there is a sense of morality. Now they didn't take that morality too far, they allowed for gods who wouldn't tolerate murder but they didn't mind adultery. They made gods to accommodate their theology but at least the germ of morality was there.

And so we learn from just a little look at the Maltese people that Romans 1 and 2 is very accurate. Pagans with no written revelation have the Law of God internally revealed, manifesting kindness and love toward needy strangers and manifesting a sense of morality and that wrong deserve judgment. Now this is that which God has planted into man's heart. Now notice the contrast. One is a sense of goodness the other is a sense of evil. Goodness and its consequences; evil and its consequences.

Folks, those are the two sides of morality. Those are the two sides of everything that exists in a moral concept. And so we see that the pagans have the full understanding of goodness and evil. Now this all began when Eve and Adam bit the fruit and received the knowledge of what? Good and evil. And men have that sensitivity, they have that awareness and that's why God holds them responsible for their activities. And we believe that if they live up to that which is good, they live up to the good moral standard of God, they believe and accept as much revelation as they have, God will continue to reveal Himself to them.

Well, what happened was interesting. Verse 5, they say - Oh, he's had it, he's a murderer, look what's happening. "He shook the beast into the fire and felt no harm." A little flick of the hand and flop the

thing goes into the fire and no harm. Well, folks, that kind of calmness is conspicuous. Usually such a snakebite would create a panic and a person would be running around, flailing around in horror.

It says he felt no harm, flicked the snake off. You know, this is an interesting thing because, you know, this is a fulfillment of prophesy?

It is. Let me show you something. Go back in your Bible to Luke 10 and I'll show you two passages. "When the Lord first sent out the seventy to talk about the kingdom." They must have had a lot of snakes in those days. But when He sent them out He told them this promise, verse 18. (Well, He gave them a lot of things.) I like this; go back to verse 17, "And the seventy returned with joy saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us through Your name.'" Terrific. "And He said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." Sure he's subject to My name, I remember when he fell. Listen, "Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy and nothing shall by any means hurt you." Now He says don't rejoice in that the spirits are subject to you, rejoice that your names are written in heaven. That's a positive. So He says, I give you the power to tread on serpents. He sent them out with the ability to do that. Now I want you to look at Mark 16:18. Now here He says to His disciples, You're go to go in the world and many signs are going to accompany your ministry. You're going to cast out demons, you're going to speak with new language, verse 17, Mark 16: "They shall take up serpents and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them." Now you see, it's fulfilled, isn't it? Now remember this, folks, that is not for today. You drink a bottle of poison, you have no guaranties except that you'll be dead. And if you play with poisonous snakes you cannot claim Mark 16:18. It's interesting that the same people who want to claim that the speaking with new language was not just for the apostles aren't anxious to claim the drinking of poison or the playing with poisonous snakes. This was purely for the apostolic era and an important thing. Now here is a fulfillment of it. He just flicks off a poisonous snake. You say, -Well, why this? I mean, what a silly thing to happen? You know why God let that happen? Can you imagine the reaction of the people? God used miracles to confirm His apostles and to confirm their divine source and to confirm their word. Incidentally, I can't help when he flicked tha snake off I think about the fact that ultimately the ultimate snake is going to be flicked off, Satan himself; Romans 16:20, "I'll shortly put Satan under Your feet." I like to think about that. Well, immediately when he flicks the thing off, verse 6: "However they looked when he should have swollen." They looked at him figuring that hand would just bloat fast, "Or fallen down dead suddenly." They expected him to keel over dead. "But after they had looked a great while and saw no harm come to him they changed their minds and said that he was a god." Let me tell you something about pagan theology. Very fickle, very, very subjective.

All of a sudden he's not a murderer, he's a god. Such a mighty miracle suggests his deity. Well, you say, wasn't that wonderful? No, Paul didn't like that. He didn't like to be thought of as God he wanted to be thought of as a representative of God not as God or a god. Remember back in the 14th chapter? He was there in the area of Galatia, and there was this guy crippled from his birth in

verse 10, and Paul was preaching; and he looked out, and there was this guy, and he says, "Stand on your feet, fella." The guy leaps up and jumps around. The people saw what he did, they lifted up their voices saying in the speech of Lycaonia, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men and they called Barnabas Jupiter and Paul Mercury." And they brought out a bunch of animals to sacrifice to Jupiter and Mercury. And Paul and Barnabas tore their clothes and ran crying, "Sirs, why are you doing these things? We are men with like passions as you. We preach unto you that you should turn from these vanities unto the living God." They didn't want to be a part of that proliferation of deities, that polytheism that they were involved in. They wanted to be the representatives of the true God, not a god. And so it wasn't any great thing when they said to Paul he is a god. But it was good that they recognized supernatural power, right?

Because that is the platform on which Paul's gospel is made creditable as a divine revelation. They were idolaters. They had created gods after the image of beasts and four footed things and creeping things such as Romans 1:21 and 22 indicates. They had rejected the true God; though they had the revelation in their hearts they had prostituted it into an idolatry, and Paul did not want to be a part of their idolatry and their blasphemy. They're a classic illustration of Romans 1. They have a knowledge of goodness. They have a knowledge of evil and its punishment, and they have a knowledge of God which they pervert into idolatry. And so they called him a god. And although Paul did not want that, it was certainly good to have some kind of esteem in their eyes because from that basis he could say something to them that they might listen to.

That brings us to the third point; we're going to hurry. The public healing. After the startling miracle that just occurred and I told you that God blesses people who are good to His people, so remember that, be good to us Christians. Verse 7, the public healing. "In the same quart that means in the same vicinity of the shipwreck, "were possessions", that means an estate, "of the chief man of the island." Now here's number-one citizen, the official title of the guy who ran the place. Here is the number-one man, the person who is in charge of Malta. He lived in that vicinity, he had a very large estate, a huge estate. In fact, this title here, the chief man of the island, appears on two Maltese inscriptions that we have discovered in archaeology digs, one is in Greek and one is in Latin so we know it's exactly what the man was called, the chief man or the first man of the island. His name was Publius. "Now Publius received us and lodged us three days courteously."

Now that will give you some kind of an idea of what kind of a pad the guy had, 276 people he put up for three days. Now that's a fairly nice layout. And it was only temporary, they were going to have to spend the winter in Malta but he wanted to keep them for three days till they could make some final arrangements for winter quarters. Verse 9: "It came to pass that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux. Now 1611 medicine leaves a lot to be desired, and the King James was written in 1611, and "bloody flux" just doesn't seem to make it. "Fever" I understand. The word for "fever" in the Greek is the word *puretos*, and it means a gastric fever. The fact that it is in the plural, "fevers," indicates that it was a recurring gastric fever. Now the "bloody flux" is the Greek word

dysenterio from which we get the word *dysentery*, which is an intestinal disease. Now what he really had here was some kind of recurrent dysentery and a gastric fever accompanying it. Some historians record that this was a common problem in Malta because they had a certain kind of microbe in their goats' milk. And so here is Publius' father who has this gastric problem, dysentery, to whom Paul entered in, prayed, laid his hands on him and healed him. Now that - here was this generous Publius, this pagan, opens his house to 276 people, you know, when somebody's going to stay at your house, you have a discussion with your wife whether you can handle one or two. Two hundred seventy-six people--no wonder the Lord healed his father. Thank you, Publius. And he laid his hands on him and healed him.

Now I want you to notice this thing, he did two things, he prayed and he laid his hands on him. Why did he pray? Because all power is from whom? God. Why did he lay his hands on him? Because he wanted him to see that it was through him that God moved in power. That it was the power of God but that Paul was the agent or the representative of that power. What Paul was doing by praying and laying hands on was identifying God's power and the fact that he was God's agent. Now there is something that isn't said here but it needs to be added to the text in this sense. I am totally convinced that what Paul also did here was to preach and I think the reason it doesn't say that is because it's so obvious. The Lord Jesus Christ did not perform miracles without speaking to point out the fact that these miracles were to corroborate the testimony of the gospel. Peter when he performed miracles earlier in Acts preached Christ. Paul when he did miracles preached Christ having established the confirmation of divine agency he then proclaimed the divine message. So if Paul healed, believe it, Paul preached. And tradition tells us that he founded in these days the church at Malta.

And tradition also tells us that the first pastor of the Maltese Christians was Publius. And very likely if he had a house that could handle 276 guests that's probably where the church began too. And so we can be even though it doesn't say, fairly confident the church was founded then and agreeing with tradition that Publius may well have been the first pastor and the church could have possibly even met in his house. Someday just to be sure, we'll check out the Lamb's Book of Life when we get there and we'll well see a list of Maltese names and at the top will be Publius and maybe following it will be names like Julius, a Roman centurion and a few other people from a certain ship that had a wreck on the coast of Malta. These were days, I think, when everything that Paul had been saying about God was coming to pass and he was beginning to preach the gospel and, boy, it must have been a time of believing response. Well, verse 9, "And when this was done", when Publius was healed, "others also on the island which had diseases came and were healed." You say, - Why? Because God was showing His kindness to those who had been kind to His people. More than that, God was establishing the credibility of Paul as His minister. We know Paul was on the island three or four months so he had plenty of time to follow up that confirmation with the message.

Now I just want to add this thought. One of the reasons I believe that these people really had a church begun and that many of them came to Christ is verse 10. It says, "Who also honored us with

many honors and when we departed", three or four months later--three months literal--verse 11, "when we departed they placed on board such things as were necessary." Now listen to this. Three months of preaching the gospel on the island of Malta is going to do one of two things. Make Christians or make what? Enemies. You're either going to make those Maltese into Christians or you're going to alienate their affections. They were kind at the first. It's hard to imagine that if Paul came down on their pagan religion, if he clunked their paganism in the right places time and time again for three months they wouldn't be giving him all kinds of goodies when he left, they wouldn't be honoring he and the others when he left they would be throwing them out of town as they had done in so many other cities where he had been. The indication of the honor in verse 10 and the placing on board of such things as were necessary in response to 3 months of preaching, 3 months of attacks on their false idolatrous religion is indication to me that these by now, many of them were believers and that indeed a church had begun at Malta.

Verse 11: "After three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria"...another one of those grain ships..."which had wintered in the isle whose sign was Castor and Pollux." They had to spend the three months of winter there, it was time to leave. And so they grabbed another ship.

Probably very similar to the one they had before. Notice the terms Castor and Pollux, these were the twins called Gemini in the constellation They were the patrons of navigation. They were supposedly the mythical sons of Jupiter. They were the ones that the navigators and the sailors looked to for security and safety and salvation in hurricanes and so they had them on the front of the ship. In fact, they were so honored by the way they protected sailors that the gods just let them ascend into heaven and they plopped themselves into a constellation now called Gemini. That's mythology. But that's to identify the ship.

Now the promise is honored, point four, just to give you this quickly. "They landed after they left Malta, they landed at Syracuse", not New York, Syracuse, Sicily, "and tarried there three days." Tradition says that Paul founded a church there too. Now I don't know whether that's true but it sounds like him. I mean, I've got the three days here I might as well start a church. Amazing, I'm telling you, and there's no way to calculate the man's spirit. And, incidentally, Sicily is an island about 60 or 70 miles away from Malta. And a three day lay over there. Verse 13; "And from there we fetched a compass", that literally means we tacked, tacking back and forth because of the wind, "came to Rhegium, and after one day the south wind blew and we came the next day to Puteoli." Now Puteoli is the lovely port in the bay of Naples. Today it's called Pozzuoli, and it is a chief port in the old days for the grain fleet--145 miles southwest of Rome the ships would come in there, as well as at Ostia, and come in the other way on the Tiber River, but they would come this way and transport across the land.

And here was this city Puteoli. Verse 14 says: "Where we found brethren." It was a large Jewish community in Puteoli. It was a trade center like Corinth or Ephesus or Antioch, and it would be

occupied by Jews who were there for the trade business. They found some Christians there and they had a terrific time for seven days with the Christians. Some think the church at Puteoli and at Rome could have been founded as early as 50 to 60 A.D., so that's very possible. It wasn't a church that Paul founded; they were already there. And it must have been a blessed fellowship, an exciting time as they shared together. Paul finally, was just 145 miles from Rome and here was a group of Christians it must have thrilled his heart. But the interesting thing about it here is that you would think he would be thrilled and happy beyond imagination but he's really discouraged. And we'll find that out in a minute but I asked myself why is he discouraged? Well, maybe he's sick, maybe the thorn in the flesh is bothering, maybe the strain of all the years, maybe the anticipation of an impossible task in Rome, maybe the realization that he's a prisoner and he's afraid he might be confined and unable to minister. Maybe he wonders whether the Christians in Rome will receive him. I don't know but he's discouraged. But they left Puteoli at the end of verse 4: "So we came to Rome." So we came to Rome, at last. Now they would have had to go from Puteoli on the very famous Appian highway--the Appian Way, named for Claudius Appianus who was the commissioning builder in 312. It led to Rome so off they go into the Appian Way from there verse 15, "when the brethren heard of us they came to meet us as far as the forum of Appianus." You know how far that is? Thirty-three miles. Paul's all the way going and then he's thinking - I wonder if the Christians are going to receive me, I wonder how it's going to work, and he's discouraged and despondent and 33 miles from town those Christians have walked and they greet him as he comes in the caravan chained as a prisoner and they go along with him. But before he even met those people, and there were others from the Three Taverns, that's ten more miles. From 33 and 43 miles out of town he met these Christians. Listen, the result of what Paul saw he thanked God and...What?...took courage. He was encouraged. Oh, he was so thrilled at this reception. It had been three years since he wrote the Roman letter, three years since he said I want to come to you and minister to you and impart a spiritual gift and mutually be comforted by you, three years had gone by and they had remembered him and they were eager for him and 43 miles they walked and 33 others walked.

The last point that we see here is the prisoner housed in verse 16. "And 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 a soldier that kept him." He had his house, a house of his own. He was chained all the time to a Roman soldier--verse 20 tells us about that, and verse 30 he had his own house, and his own private guard was chained to him. Whenever I think about him being chained to the guard I always think about the guard being chained to him and I think that's probably worse. Never being able to get away from that guy would really be tough.

Now let me just close with this thought. Now stay with me because I'm just going to mention these things. What I see in this passage is the tremendous faithfulness of God to a faithful man. God says, I will fulfill the desire of all them that fear me. Now look what God does with this man. Just six things. Number one, he surrounds him with kindness. Have you seen it? First in chapter 27, verses 2 and 3, when they first left Caesarea he arrives in Sidon and immediately he is refreshed there and

ministered to by the Christians. In chapter 28, verses 1 and 2, his needs are met by the Maltese. In verse 10 of 28 they honored him with many honors and they gave him everything that he needed. God surrounds His faithful people with kindness. Second thing, God ministered to his needs. When he needed physical ministry. When he was sick in Sidon he was ministered to medically. In chapter 28 he was ministered by Publius in verse 7 by being given a place of lodging. He was ministered to by the necessities that were granted in verse 10. In verse 14 when he arrived in Puteoli the brethren there ministered to him. God continual ministered to his needs supplying exactly what he wanted when it was food he got food, when it was medicine he got medicine, when it was fellowship he got fellowship. Third thing, God encouraged him. Over and over again back in 27 when the ship was being torn up in the hurricane you'll remember that God came and sent an angel to him and the angel said, Don't worry Paul, you're going to make it to Rome and everybody is going to make it with you, take courage and so forth and he reported that to the people.

God encouraged him. And then I think the greatest encouragement must have been in verse 15 of 28 when he saw those Christians, 43 miles from town and all gathered at the side of the road waiting to walk with him the rest of the way, showing him their love and affection. And then ten miles further met another group and together they went to Rome and his heart was thrilled and he was encouraged. The fourth thing that God does for a faithful man is to protect him from harm. God saved him in a hurricane. We saw that. God saved him in a shipwreck. And God saved him from a snakebite. God protects His own. Fifthly, God blessed his influence. Wherever he went things happened. It's startling to think about it. He had such a dramatic influence on the ship that it's almost a forgone conclusion that some of them came to know Jesus Christ. He had such an impact on Malta that a church was begun there. It may even had been that a church had begun in Syracuse. We know that he had a profound affect on the city of Rome because many people in Caesar's household were saved. God blessed that man's influence. Everywhere he went blessing accompanied.

Sixthly and last, God fulfilled his desire. God fulfilled his desire. He wanted to get to Rome, he got to Rome. He wanted to be encouraged to know that the Christians loved him, they encouraged him. God met his desire.

What am I saying? Listen, we see a faithful man exhibiting all the qualities of a faithful leader in turn we see God giving all the blessings. Proverbs 28:20 says this: "A faithful man shall abound with blessing." Why? Because God is a faithful God. He rewards those who faithfully serve Him.

Father, we're thankful for just another example of Paul and his marvelous faithfulness. How grateful we are to see this kind of example to see You put to the test. You'd said You'd bless all who fear You.

You said You'd give the desires of the heart to those who delight in You. O, how we see it in Paul, everything he needed, every dream he dreamed all come true. Father, thank You for such manifestation of Your great faithfulness. May we believe it. May we be willing to be the kind of people

You want us to be knowing You are the kind of God You claim and You will fulfill all Your promises.
We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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