

59—Acts 28.1-16—A Island Vacation or a Mission Stop?

- I. Introduction
 - a. None of us knew exactly what the Christian life was going to be like when we started following Jesus. We were called to obey before we understood. Obviously, there are some who obeyed and when they understood what it was like decided to abandon Jesus. We must remember that God's good promises belong only to those who continue to trust him.
 - b. As we near the end of Acts, we can look back and see this was an impossible journey apart from the providence of God. There's no other way to explain what has happened unless the Risen Lord Jesus had not provided for his witnesses. The mission does not rest on man but God. We trust and obey. We go. Share the gospel. Pray. Trust the Lord to work.
 - c. And when there are obstacles, we continue to trust the Lord and oftentimes he uses those obstacles in ways we would never have expected.
- II. Main Point
 - a. The word continues to spread with plenty of obstacles but God uses the obstacles to make himself known through his providential care.
- III. Outline
 - a. Responding to God's Providence
 - b. Safe on Malta?
 - c. Why did Publius's father have fever and dysentery?
- IV. Exposition
 - a. As the story continues, those who have survived the sea by God's providential care, have no idea where they have landed and if the inhabitants of this land are favorable people or not. This could be an "out of the pot into the fire" situation. Yet, it would be strange to save them from the sea and let them be slaughtered by some barbarian tribe. But all of them have made it to shore and they might be wondering what's next? Let's consider what God's providence is and how we ought to respond.
 - i. Let's first, define what God's providence is.
 1. God's providence is how we understand God's relationship with His creation.
 - a. Simply put, God's providence is "the act of purposefully providing for, or sustaining and governing, the world."
 2. The BFM 2000 describes God the Father like this: God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace.
 3. To back up a few years to the Baptist Confession of faith in 1689 says this: "God the good Creator of all things, in His infinite power and wisdom does uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, to the end for the which they were created, according unto His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will; to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy."
 - ii. There are many more places we could turn for definitions and all of these have tons of Bible references to back up their statements. Sometimes it's best to hear how people have understood God's relationship to his creation wrongly.
 1. Some people have thought that God created the world and left it to take care of itself. Like winding up an alarm clock and letting it run until the end.
 2. Others somehow think that creation is part of God. Providence teaches that though God is actively related to and involved in the creation at each moment, creation is distinct from him.
 3. Also, the events in creation are not determined by chance or luck.

4. They are not determined by impersonal fate, but by God, who is the personal yet infinitely powerful Creator and Lord.
 - a. (Each of these four statements were quoted from Grudem p. 315)
- iii. Why does any of this matter? How do we see this in our text from last week and this week and every day of our lives?
 1. Last week's text helps us see God's providential care over the 276 souls onboard that ship.
 - a. If you recall, the crew attempted to escape in the lifeboat by pretending to put out anchors from the bow.
 - i. God had revealed to Paul that everyone onboard would survive.
 - ii. That doesn't mean they can sit back and not act. How was that ship going to make it to shore without the crew?
 1. Of course, God can miraculously deliver the ship to the shore. But normally God works through his creation to protect.
 2. They had planned to leave the others helpless with on one who knew how to sail the ship.
 3. Paul didn't see them sneaking away and think God will take us to shore. But rather, he told the centurion, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved."
 4. "Wisely, Paul knows that God's providential oversight and even his clear prediction of what would happen still involved the use of ordinary human means to bring it about." (Grudem 336)
 2. There are numerous examples in both stories, but this week we have a situation with a snake.
 - a. First, does it matter if Paul has knowledge of the snake being in the bundle of wood or not?
 - i. If Paul knows there's a snake in it and he picks it up anyway because he thinks God will protect him, is that trusting in God's providential care?
 - ii. I'm sure you are aware of snake-handling churches. They think their faith will protect them from their poisonous venom.
 1. When they do receive a bite, they cannot go to the hospital because they deem that to be a lack of faith.
 2. Unfortunately, they often die from the snake bite or survive and continue to deceive people.
 - iii. If Paul knew the snake was in the bundle, he would have been testing God not trusting God when he picked it up.
 1. And in doing so, he should not expect God's providential care to protect him.
 - iv. However, there's no indication that he knew the snake was in there but God providentially protected him from the poisonous venom.
 - v. And we must also understand, God's providential care has purposes we may not understand immediately, only after trusting and obeying.
 - iv. We live in God's world. We are his creation. How will you respond to the events of life each day?
 1. Will you trust the Lord's good providence or test the Lord?
 2. If the finance committee comes with a new budget that is twice the size of our normal budget, should you accept it?
 - a. Well, if God has added twice as many people and the giving is double then yes.

- b. But if none of those things are true, then it would not be a matter of faith to increase the budget without no financial responsibility.
 - c. I don't mean to say we cannot push ourselves to do more. That's not my point.
 - 3. More important than responding to budgets, how would you respond to the providential barriers that Paul keeps running into?
 - a. If you had survived the shipwreck and then gotten bitten by a snake, would you have been done with Jesus?
 - b. We need to see these obstacles differently under the providential care of God.
 - c. Let's see how this story unfolds.
 - b. As they drag themselves out of the cold sea, will this be an episode out of Gilligan's Island or maybe there's some nice resorts to just sit back and enjoy over the winter or are there savages here that will have them for supper? What are they expecting? Are that safe on Malta or not?
 - i. Immediately, they learn there in v. 1 what island they have landed on.
 - 1. It is the island of Malta which as you can see on the map is several miles south of Sicily.
 - a. We are still not sure what they expected but it seems it was possible they were not sure how the natives would respond.
 - b. There in verse 2, the native people (literally barbarians) were showing us unusual kindness.
 - i. In other words, their care for them was not ordinary and unexpected.
 - ii. They cared for them by kindling a fire with a hearty welcome.
 - 1. Not only were they wet from swimming in the sea, but it had begun to rain and it was cold.
 - a. Would you have been standing on the shore looking up at God saying, "I didn't sign up for this."?
 - 2. It seems God is providentially caring for these 276 souls through the unusual kindness of these barbarians.
 - ii. The next scene involves the snake. Paul does not see his role as merely a guest but a servant. He joins the natives in collecting dry wood for the fire.
 - 1. Many people would not have found themselves in this situation because they seek to be served instead of serving.
 - 2. I believe it is obvious that Paul did not know the snake was in the bundle but that doesn't take away the immediate difficulty Paul encounters.
 - a. How will Paul response to the snake?
 - i. He could have lashed out at the Lord in front of everyone there.
 - 1. He could have said: "All that I've been through and now this?"
 - 2. Or "Wasn't the shipwreck enough? Come on, Lord."
 - 3. "I'm done with you, Jesus. I have nothing left. That's it."
 - 3. That's not how Paul responds to this apparent obstacle.
 - a. He shakes it off into the fire after it had attached itself to his hand.
 - i. When I read that verse this week, I paused and thought what an amazing image of the adversary's ultimate defeat. That day is coming!
 - iii. But how are we to understand God in his providential care in this scene? Did God forget to remove that snake?
 - 1. As the events of this story unfold, I believe we will look back on these events differently than we might initially see them.
 - a. The natives watch with certain expectation. They know very well what happens when people are bit by this creature.

- i. They even say among themselves there in (Acts 28:4) "No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live."
 - 1. Their understanding of justice is interesting. It seems they have personified Justice to some deity.
 - 2. They believe this will reveal Paul's guilt.
 - ii. However, after waiting for a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they change their mind about Paul. He moves from being thought of as murderer to a god.
 - iv. What was the purpose of this event?
 - 1. For now, it may have been for them to see Paul in a more favorable light.
 - a. But that doesn't always go well. Back in Lystra, they declared Paul and Barnabus to be gods but it wasn't long before they were stoning Paul to death.
- c. However, it does seem to open a door to the chief of the island—Publius. We need to ask the same question about the chief's father. What's the purpose in it?
 - i. We are told there in verse 7 that the chief welcomed them and entertained his guest hospitably for three days.
 - 1. So, they seem safe with the chief. One never knows how that's going to go.
 - 2. And now we come to verse 8. No one knew what to expect when they were shipwrecked on this island but the story begins to shed light on God's plan to make himself known through this seemingly terrible situation.
 - a. The verse begins with, "And it happened that..."
 - i. It's like in the story of Esther when Haman just happened to go to the palace the night that the king just happened not be able to sleep and he just happened to be reading the chronicles and his assistant just happened to be reading the part where Mordicai saved the king's life.
 - 1. The book that does not mention God seems to make him explicit through irony.
 - ii. Well, in our story this morning, the chief's father just happened to be sick.
 - iii. Paul just so happens to visit him. During the visit, he prays for him and lays hands on him and the man is healed.
 - 1. Jesus heals this man through Paul. God's providential care happens through his appointed means.
 - ii. This sets in motion a chain reaction throughout the island. The rest of the people hear about this and all the sick come to visit Paul.
 - 1. We soon discover that this is no mere island vacation but just like the tumultuous sea journey, God was there to make himself known through his witness and through the obstacles Paul faced.
 - 2. The sick come and Paul heals them.
 - a. It's been some time since we were in the gospel of John. Whether it was the story of the man born blind or the death of Lazarus, we know that God allows these things to be the means by which he displays his glory.
 - i. If you recall, Jesus intentionally delayed in going to Lazarus so that he died. This was to display the glory of God in Christ.
 - b. The glory of the Lord shines on the island of Malta.
 - c. If no one is sick, will they see God's glory and salvation?
 - d. If God allows the snake bite to kill Paul, how does this shake out?

- e. And maybe the place I want us to consider, if Paul responds negatively to the obstacles throughout this whole scene, do we see this play out like this?
 - i. It matters how we respond. I am not putting this completely on Paul but he is to trust the Lord's providence and he does that in the strength that God supplies.
 - ii. But I don't want to miss the reality that God works through these obstacles and makes himself known.
 - iii. Therefore, we should believe this and when "it happens" let's always leave the door open that the Lord may very well do something through them.
- iii. What are some of the obstacles we face and how should we respond?
 - 1. People who firmly hold the right understanding of the providence of God and those who do not, seem to respond much the same way.
 - a. Both sit in the halls of life waiting for God to open a door of opportunity and pick us up and shove us through it.
 - b. However, we ought to be turning handles, engaging in conversation, serving others, loving our neighbors, being hospitable to strangers or in other words the very normal rhythms of life for the believer.
 - c. And in those normal rhythms, God makes himself known to others.
 - d. We can't only pray for kids to come to VBS, we must ask parents, send messages, post on Facebook, talk to neighbors, and all of that is weird and awkward if we never do that with others.
 - e. Fear of others, fear of change, fear of failing should not cripple we who believe in the good providence of Almighty God.
- iv. As we press on to the end of this story, let's take note that not only are they safe but well supplied for the upcoming journey.
 - 1. Beginning there in verse 10, Luke describes how the barbarians of Malta honored them greatly.
 - a. All their supplies that had been thrown overboard during the journey or lost in the wreckage, were supplied by the people.
 - i. God provides in the most unique ways. He is the God who provides.
 - ii. In big ways and small ways, God provides.
- v. After a three month stay, the group boards a ship that had been wintering there and set sail for Rome.
 - 1. They make a few stops along the way but the journey finally comes to an end.
 - 2. Jesus had told Paul that he was going to Rome. There have been plenty of questionable moments, but Jesus keeps his word and through this story, we ought to be encouraged to trust the Lord in everything.
 - 3. I believe the Lord was making himself known on that ship and on the island of Malta even through the many obstacles that came up.
 - 4. And now we find Paul surrounded by brothers and sisters in Christ as he travels the last leg of his journey to Rome.
 - 5. He's allowed to stay by himself with a soldier who undoubtedly heard the gospel and saw the gospel lived out in the life of Paul.
- vi. Well, how many believed?
 - 1. All 276 and all the people on the island? None? Some?
 - a. I suppose we have no way of knowing. I do wonder why chapter 28 switches from they to we.

- i. Either Luke is just referring to himself, Paul and Aristarchus or he refers to everyone in a way that sounds like all had believed.
- ii. Whatever happened in the hearts of those people, God's witnesses should respond to obstacles by trusting in the good providence of God.
- iii. We should trust that God will bring us safely home.

V. Response

- a. I believe we are on a similar journey. We are not going to Rome but we are seeking to make Christ known in the upcoming VBS.
- b. We can plan and pray and hope. But if we do not go and invite and call, message, post, tell, etc. then we have no reason to believe anyone will come.
- c. There will be obstacles along the way. May the Lord give us strength to respond in a way that displays our trust in his good providence.
- d. We want kids from our neighborhood to trust in Christ. They cannot believe unless they hear.
- e. And as we've already encountered through out the acts of the Risen Lord Jesus, we are called to an impossible task unless God works through us.
 - i. (Acts 26:17-18) I am sending you ¹⁸ to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.
 - ii. We know this can only happen by the power of God.
- f. Do you trust the Lord? Repent and believe the amazing salvation God has worked for those he came to save.