

UNSTOPPABLE

GOD'S WORK
IN THE WORLD

VILLAGE BIBLE
CHURCH

MAKING LEMONADE OUT OF LEMONS

Lesson 25

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DEVOTIONAL

We are almost at the final moment of this extraordinary story told by Luke. It began, in his second volume (that book we call “Acts”; the first volume being what we call the Gospel of Luke), with the architecture of the book being announced that it would describe how the gospel of the kingdom goes from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and then to the ends of the earth. That story will not finish with Acts, because that story is still not yet finished. We are a part of taking the gospel of the kingdom to our Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and ends of the earth. But here, at least, Paul arrives now at the center of the Empire: in Rome.

First, we meet him still on Malta. The indigenous people move from thinking he is a criminal, to thinking he is a god, to being grateful for the way God used him to heal them. And then Paul and his companions travel to Rome, where he is now under house arrest.

What can we learn from this nearly final stage of the story?

First, to make the most of the moments along the way, as well as the destination. Paul knew that Malta was not his destination. And yet he ministered with passion and grace and power in that place, too. We can sometimes be so goal-focused that we lose sight of the opportunity right in front of us. In the gas station. In the checkout at the supermarket. In the office cubicle. This too is an opportunity. How can you make the most of it for the advance of the kingdom?

Second, we learn of the healing power of God. Christians disagree as to what extent such gifts of healing still operate today, but all agree that God can and sometimes does still heal. He does it through miraculous means on occasion, as well as through modern medicine. Let us be those who not only preach the gospel with words, but also take care of those around us and minister to their real needs out of love for them and love for Christ. Look how powerful Paul's witness is because he healed their sick!

Third, we can learn again of God's amazing providence and gracious protection. They arrive in Rome and are, for the moment, safe there. After all the difficulties of the journey, how sweet is the simple, safe arrival.

Fourth, we can learn of the sweetness of godly fellowship. Paul saw these brothers and sisters who had heard that they were coming and took courage. Our presence, just being there for people, can give a fellow Christian a great new lease on life and a sense of courage. Do not underestimate the power of being with someone and showing you care by coming alongside and expressing your care in practical ways. That can be how God shows that he cares for them too.¹

¹ Devotional by Josh Moody found @ <https://godcenteredlife.org/devotional/acts-281-16-almost-there/> © 2014–2018 God Centered Life. All Rights Reserved.

OPEN IT

1. What island would you like to visit or have enjoyed visiting? What draws you to this particular island?

READ IT

Acts 28:1-16

EXPLORE IT

2. Who showed Paul and his fellow travelers kindness on the island?
3. What did the people think when Paul was bitten by the snake?
4. What happened to Paul instead and how did the people around him respond?
5. Who was Publius and what did he do for Paul? What was Paul able to do for him?
6. How was Paul feeling when he arrived in Rome?

Hospitality comes from two Greek words: *philos* which means “friend” and *xenos* which means “stranger.” Hospitality is the love of strangers.

10. What makes serving strangers more difficult than our service to those we know? How do we balance wisdom and love as we reach out to those unknown to us?

11. Who are some strangers that we are called to show love to? What ways can you follow the model of these “natives of Malta”?

TO BE GREAT... YOU MUST BE A SERVANT

Paul did not consider it beneath his dignity to assist in the maintenance of the fire and gathered sticks up into a bundle and threw them on the blaze.⁴

12. What types of things do people think are beneath them? What can we learn from the example of Paul, and more importantly Jesus, when it comes to doing things that we think are beneath us?

⁴ Polhill, John B. *Acts: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: 26 (The New American Commentary)* (p. 531). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

ONCE BITTEN TWICE SHY

As Paul and his seafaring companions came ashore, they were met by native islanders who showed them kindness, lighting a fire for them on what was presumably an isolated beach: *“The native people showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold”* (Acts 28: 2). Luke adds that it had begun to rain and that because they had been soaked through to the skin, they were cold. As Paul joined in with others, gathering sticks from the shoreline for the fire, an extraordinary incident took place.

A snake, torpid from the cold, was mistaken for a stick, and when Paul reached the fire, the snake turned and fastened to his hand. The snake is referred to as a “viper” (Acts 28:3), something that has bothered Bible critics, since the viper in question here is poisonous, and none are known to exist on the island of Malta today. The solution is not difficult to discover: it is not unthinkable that on a small island, the population of poisonous vipers may have long since been eradicated!

13. It seems like Paul had someone working against him on his way to Rome. A tumultuous storm nearly kills him and now a viper comes out of nowhere and bites him. Could these events have been the work of the Devil? What reasons might the Devil not have wanted Paul to complete his travels?

14. How important is it for us to understand the source of our troubles, and how do we go about determining it?

15. Read Luke 13:1–5 and John 9:1–5 to see what Jesus says about this type of situation. What does the Bible say about why bad things happen to people?

Superstitious islanders watched for the worst to follow. They'd no doubt heard the story of the murderer who escaped a shipwreck on the Libyan coast, but Justice caught up with him when he died of a viper's bite. As they watched Paul shake the snake into the fire, they concluded he, too, was a murderer getting what he deserved. To their surprise, Paul did not drop dead from the venom. The Maltese then decided he must be a god!⁵

16. Superstition is ages old and remains popular today. What are some examples of modern-day superstitions? Are these harmless or should they be avoided by Christ followers? Explain.

17. Paul and his companions are invited to a pagan home with all of the entanglements of pagan life and entertainment. How does Luke view this invitation and time spent together?

18. What can we learn from this text about God that can bring peace in times of storms in our own lives?

What should be our practice when it comes to such opportunities?

⁵ Girard, Robert C. *The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series)* (Kindle Locations 5695-5699). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

19. When Paul was about to leave, we are told that the Maltese people “honored him greatly.” In what ways might unbelievers honor the believers around them? Is this something we should seek out as Christians?

It was forty miles— a one-day trip— to Syracuse, main port of the island of Sicily. From Syracuse the ship sailed to the toe of the Italian peninsula, putting in at Rhegium. Another day’s sailing brought it to Puteoli, which, in the first century, was the busiest port in southern Italy, located in the most sheltered part of the Bay of Naples. There passengers disembarked and traveled the rest of the way to Rome on the famous Appian Way.

Evidently Centurion Julius had a week’s worth of official red tape to attend to before continuing to Rome. In a welcome serendipity it was discovered there were some Christian brothers in Puteoli. Paul and his companions were permitted, under guard, to spend the week with them. Evidently the Puteoli Christians sent word to Rome that Paul had arrived. Two delegations of Christians hiked down the Appian Way to meet and escort him to Rome.⁶

20. How does this text display both the sovereign providence of God and the responsibility of humans?

21. How could Paul's experience have caused him to give God thanks and be filled with courage? In what ways and for what things does God deserve your thanks?

⁶ Girard, Robert C. *The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series)* (Kindle Locations 5717-5720). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

Note: This study was compiled, and questions were written by Pastor Tim Badal, Village Bible Church. www.villagebible.church/smallgroups