

Acts 28:1-11 Bonfire on the Beach

11/27/16

After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta. ² 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. ³ When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. ⁴ When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, “No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live.” ⁵ He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. ⁶ They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.

(Pastor prays)

Everyone here needs to know where they fit -- in life, at work, in school. If you are dating someone, after a while, you want to know where things are and where they are going. If you are on a team, you want to know your position. In a broader sense, in this world, you want and really need to have an idea of what your place is in this world. Because life, in so many ways, can be disorienting. And when you are disoriented, it can be terribly difficult to get a good grasp on your place in this world.

Now that we are in the last chapter of Acts, things have become terribly unbalanced and disorienting for Paul. The raging sea has destroyed his ship and vomited him up on an island called Malta. He doesn't have a possession in the world. His career is over and he's soaking wet and starving. He's hundreds of miles from home and yet his security is in Christ and his identity as a Christian and the fact that he's alive.

The fact that you are alive means that God is nowhere near done with you. Let's read a little of the story so I can point out a few things before we get into the body of the sermon. *After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta. ² 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. ³ When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. ⁴ When the native people saw the creature hanging*

from his hand, they said to one another, “No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live.”⁵ He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. ⁶ They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.

Here’s a truth we can get a hold of.

When You Are in Christ, You’re Place is Right Where You Are

He has you here. After all the good, after all the bad, after the breakup or whatever. He has you in this place for several reasons we can hopefully glean from this passage. He has you here to show you...

You Are an Object of Divine Care

We look at Paul’s life to see this. He’s been through so much. At the end of Acts 27:42-28:1, *The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape. ⁴³ But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, ⁴⁴ and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land. **28** After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta.*

See how the Lord protected him? And the truth is that God, in His goodness, has protected you through so many things in your life--things you didn’t even know about--and all of that saving, preserving and protecting grace is a reminder that, as a man or woman in Christ, you are an object of divine care. Even those of you who have been through difficulties like Paul, God gave you small graces through the struggle. The small planks and pieces that people floated on were tokens of His goodness and some of you feel like that’s what you are on. In Chapter 28:1, God caused the natives to be kind to the shipwrecked crew. Even Luke says they showed an unusual kindness. If you can actually see yourself as an object of divine care, that He actually does take care of you, it will do several things:

1. Press you into gratitude. To be more overtly and continuously thankful to God. It's what Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:18: *give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* Not only thanks to God, but when you understand God's protective care for you even though you were a rebel to His plan before you were in Christ...
2. I think it drives you to be more patient with irritating people or maybe more gracious to people trapped in some sin. Remembering what Paul said to the church of Corinth: *"and such were some of you."* When you genuinely see yourself as an object of God's grace, it makes your heart soft and eyes clearer, so that you can better empathize with people in pain. It's what the cross of Christ does for us and to us.

He's put you right here, right now, so that you can see yourself as an object of divine care. There's something else to glean from this passage.

You Are an Example of Divine Love

You are put here (if you are a Christian) to live as an example. Even the name, Christian, was a term of derision that believers got in Antioch and it meant "Little Christs" because the believers tried to imitate Jesus. Here in Chapter 28, after a gut-wrenching voyage that culminated in a catastrophic wreck that almost drowned Paul, he lands on Malta (Place of Refuge) and look what Paul is doing when he gets bit. Acts 28:1-3: *After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta. ² 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. ³ When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand.* Even though Paul should have been credited with saving the entire crew and 276 passengers, he's serving, like everyone else, gathering firewood, because he saw himself as a trophy of God's grace and he lived as an example.

And as a believer in Christ, it's imperative that you get a handle on the love of God for you. Even the apostle John exclaims in 1 John 3:1, *See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God.*

And Paul himself wrote in Philippians 2:5-8, to look to Christ as an example: *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

Paul tells us of the crucifixion not only for its saving power but also that we might live following Christ's example. When that happens, you develop a heart to serve, not to be served. When that happens, you develop a mind of humility, not demands. When you see Christ and His love on the cross, your life becomes a life of giving and of generosity. And so, even as you wonder why God has you where you are, He has you here as an object of divine care and an example of divine love. One more thing about being where you are -

You Are a Picture of Divine Truth

Let me take you back to the story. Listen to how the islanders interpret the events: *³ When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. ⁴ When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live." ⁵ He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. ⁶ They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.*

They had an idea of Justice: "He got what was coming to him." – sort of Malta's version of Karma. We say that even today. "What goes around, comes around" or the whole idea of paying it forward. You do something nice for someone and maybe someone will do something nice for you. That's not Christianity. That *quid pro quo* – Karma. That's how the islanders thought, because notice what happens when he didn't die: *⁶ They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds.*

Oh, well since he didn't die, he must be a god." And neither thing was true. And although we are far removed from Malta, we interpret life similarly. When things go poorly, we are being punished. When things go well – we are being blessed. And we forget the economy of grace has eclipsed the economy of law.

As Spurgeon said, "Because of my sin, any day that I receive something better than Hell, is a day of God's grace."

I want to close by talking--to those of you who are not yet believers-- about God's preserving grace. He's kept you alive and worked in your life so that you can hear about the saving grace. (*Pastor shares the Gospel*).

Maybe you are wondering where your place really is. Your place is in Christ that you might become an object of divine care, an example of divine love and a picture of divine truth.

(Pastor prays)