

# From Malta to Rome

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[ 0 : 00 ] How many sermons do we have left in our Acts series?! Did I say Acts?

Oh, yeah. Yeah, so we're going to start over. So if you forgot the very beginning, fear not. Wow. See, it's just like fused. It's tattooed on my brain. Romans.

Romans. Wow. Wow. Thanks, everyone, for that. Steeped in Acts, can you tell? So welcome here for this Sunday, November 16, 2025.

My name is Kent Dixon, and it really is my joy to be the pastor here. So this morning, we are continuing in our ongoing sermon series, Acts to All of the World.

And we've been digging into the history of the early church together to see what we can learn from the people and the places and the events that we've read about. So when I started over in the new year, very small.

[ 1 : 34 ] That was like a joke, only a lot smaller. So we are going to be wrapping up this series next Sunday. And the timing of that is good as we then move into the Advent season on Sunday, November 30th.

So our passage for this morning is found in Acts 28, verses 1 to 16. So go ahead and turn to that in your Bible. Grab a Bible from the pew in front of you.

Or listen as I read. And this passage is far shorter than last Sunday. So soft snoring that I heard as I read last Sunday.

So Acts 28, 1 to 16 is where we find ourselves this morning. Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta.

The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. Paul gathered a pile of brushwood, and as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand.

[ 2 : 39 ] When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, this man must be a murderer. For though he escaped from the sea, the goddess of justice has not allowed him to live.

But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead. But after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.

There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and showed us generous hospitality for three days. His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery.

Paul went in to see him and after prayer placed his hands on him and healed him. When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. They honored us in many ways. And when we were ready to set sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed. After three months, we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered on the island. It was an Alexandrian ship with a figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux.

[ 3 : 51 ] We put in at Syracuse and stayed there for three days. From there we set sail and arrived at Regium. The next day, the south wind came up and on the following day, we reached Putioli.

There we found some brothers and sisters who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. The brothers and sisters there had heard that we were coming and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the three taverns to meet us.

At the sight of these people, Paul thanked God and was encouraged. When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself with a soldier to guard him. To catch the we, what does that mean? Right. Who was there? Right. So the author of Acts, Luke, we've recognized over time that whenever we hear we in the narrative, it means Luke was there.

Sometimes he may have just been recording or relating events in his writing. But when he says we, we went on the ship. We got stranded. All those things. That means Luke was there.

[ 5 : 00 ] Our sermon this morning is titled From Malta to Rome. We're picking up right where we left off last week. Immediately where we left off. And if you remember, Paul and all the men who had been on board the ship were shipwrecked on the island of Malta.

But we need to remember and recognize that this vision that an angel had given Paul, that God would protect, maybe you remember this, he received a vision that God would protect everyone on the ship and they would all survive.

And that was exactly what happened. We also recognized last week that just as the centurion chose to listen to the owner and the pilot of the ship, rather than Paul's warnings not to continue on, we recognized how not listening to Paul in that scenario played out.

Not great. So we need to really be sure that the voices and opinions we are listening to come from God. Right? We talked about this last week, so just a quick refresher there.

We're not looking to follow someone else's personal or potentially prideful or misguided motives.

Right? When you're directed by someone who's got their own agenda, got their own interests, not necessarily seeking God first, that's maybe not the best source of guidance in your life.

[ 6 : 23 ] The people that we choose to follow, the people that we choose to guide us, must be godly voices. Or we could really wind up, like Paul and his shipmates did, wind up in stormy circumstances in our lives.

So after the castaways landed at Malta, they're warmly received by the locals, as we heard this morning. They show them hospitality, kindness, and care, and they tend to their needs.

That's what happens right away. And as Paul gathers wood and puts it on the fire, we read that a viper had been napping in the wood. He wakes up and he bites Paul squarely on the hand.

You ever been bitten by a snake? I have not, but I think that would sting. That's an owie. We don't hear much about Paul's physical abilities in Scripture.

Right? We don't, it's not like Samson we don't hear. Paul was a great teacher, and he was well studied in Scripture and so on, and the law and the prophets and all of that, and he was ripped.

[ 7 : 31 ] Like, you don't hear that. Right? But we know that he was stubborn and persistent and occasionally hot-headed. Those are things we do know about the Apostle Paul.

And we also know that he exhibited some really impressive self-control at times. Right? And we can probably recognize that that was the Holy Spirit reigning in his natural passion sometimes.

So again, have you ever been bitten by a snake? I've been bitten by a knife. As most of you know. I haven't been bitten by a snake. I'm not really afraid of snakes.

Now, spiders are an entirely different conversation. Please don't ever use that word around me. But I have to say that if a snake jumped out of somewhere, I would probably scream.

Scream. It wouldn't be like a manly, ah, kind of a holler. It would be that spine-tingling, high-pitched scream of a five-year-old girl. But then we read in this account that Paul doesn't even react by being bitten by the snake.

[ 8 : 36 ] Right? He doesn't react. Surely this would have been a pain in the ass. He brushes it off like it's nothing. Thank you. And this reaction of Paul serpent-ly isn't lost on the locals.

They've seen people die from snake bites. And then they see Paul spared. Right? This is a big deal. And then they move from, oh, he's a murderer, to, oh, he's a god.

Quantum leap in thinking. But that's where they land. Right? Is that Paul has some sort of divine power of some kind. So the themes of hospitality and God's provision are definitely on display in this passage.

And that's what I'm going to focus on a bit this morning. No sooner do Paul and his companions receive this kindness and care from the local people that they learn they're near the estate of the chief official of the island of Malta.

They're invited to his home and we read again this feature of hospitality they're shown generous hospitality for three days.

[ 9 : 48 ] Total strangers are welcomed to the island and entertained and cared for for three days. So while they're staying with the official, they learn that his father is suffering from dysentery.

Paul goes to visit the man, he prays for him, and the man is cured. Then we learn that the man, after the man is cured, the rest of the sick people from the island gather, presumably to see Paul, right?

That's fair. And they are also then healed from sicknesses. It's such a neat reciprocal blessing that's happening here, I think. God brought Paul and his group to this specific place where he knew, God knew there was a need.

He uses the people of the island to bless, encourage, and care for Paul and his group. And then in turn, God uses Paul to bless and heal the people, the very people, who have shown care and hospitality to his servant.

So then the people show their appreciation for all Paul and his companions have done for them. They give them a warm send-off, right? There's more hospitality here. making sure that they are resupplied for the rest of their journey.

[11:07] So when we come to Acts 28, verse 11, it's important to note the significance of the coming events. So for those of you who are familiar with the book of Acts, you get where this is going, right?

Paul is in the last leg of his journey towards Rome. And Rome is the place where you may know or you may not know, Paul would spend the rest of his life in prison.

He would also, from Rome, from prison, preach some of his most impactful sermons that God continued his call on Paul's life and that Paul would complete some of the most impactful and powerful writing of his entire ministry from prison in Rome.

Verses 10 and 11 of our passage this morning indicate a bit of a time jump. It first sounds like the local people were sending them off on this next leg of their journey. Maybe soon-ish, right?

This might be happening. But then verse 11 is funny because it tells us it was three months before they left Malta to head to Rome. I kind of flipped and looked at that and went, see you guys later, have a good trip, three months.

[12:24] In three months. Right? It's a little bit weird. Maybe it was a long goodbye. A really, really, really long goodbye. But I think what may be at work here is that it was probably the time of year.

So they wanted, understandably, these guys wanted to avoid more rough seas, right? We can understand after last Sunday's sermon why. Not a great trip.

And it was more than a three-hour tour. So they delayed their departure. And again, whatever the reason, it's still a long goodbye. We learn then that the group set out in a ship that had been docked at the island over the winter.

So this also, I think, supports the idea that they probably waited out the winter on the island of Malta. So then we learn that they headed from Malta to the island of Syracuse where they stayed for three days.

Then they headed to a place called Regium and then a place called Putioli. And I don't know about you, but when I read that word and I say that word, it feels like I have to pinch my fingers together.

[13:32] Putioli! So hospitality plays a role again here because Paul and the group are welcomed by a group of Christians who meet them and greet them and receive them warmly.

So then the group finally arrives in Rome. And again, a local group of Christians from the greater region heard that they were coming and we read that they rushed to greet them there.

We learn that Paul was encouraged by this. No kidding. He thanked God for the blessing that this warm reception was to him and what it meant to him. And as we've seen previously, many times, with his Roman captors, Paul was kept in custody.

But, he was given both grace and space, we can see. He lived by himself with only a single soldier guarding him.

So, then I asked myself, was the guard there with Paul to make sure Paul didn't escape and take off? or was God actually providing capable protection for Paul against his enemies?

[14:44] I think it's B. As I mentioned earlier, our passage this morning brings us to this final chapter of the events in Paul's story. And our journey through the book of Acts together is beginning to wrap up.

And as I wrote that in my notes, I thought, huh, wrap up, almost Christmas time. There you go. So, what are some important things that we can recognize and take away from this passage?

Well, as I noted, hospitality is a main theme that features prominently in this passage this morning. But why is hospitality important?

Well, maybe you're thinking, duh, Pastor Kent, it's good to be good to people and give them food and things. But the word hospitality has lots of meanings.

Maybe you didn't know that, but it's true. Not all of them may immediately come to mind for us. When we were at the retreat this past week in Banff, our speaker spoke a lot about hospitality. [15:51] And there's a depth and breadth to that topic that I can't even begin to touch on, but maybe one day. Someone's got to take note, maybe Michelle will take notes of, oh yeah, and then you said you want to preach about this, and then you want to preach about that, and we should preach this book.

So when I throw those things out, I sincerely mean them, so maybe we'll get there. So in a basic sense, you know this, hospitality can mean the act of being friendly, being welcoming to guests and visitors.

It can mean opening our home to someone or sharing our table with them. It can mean buying somebody a coffee or a meal, inviting someone to your home or being invited to theirs.

These are things that I believe we immediately think about when we hear that word hospitality. The act of being hospitable to other people or, I don't know if you thought about this part, being on the receiving end of someone else's hospitality.

There are two pieces to that that I don't think we always think about. but those things are powerful interactions and they are central to Christianity.

[17:03] God has laid a table for us. This is not simply about inviting someone into your home, but inviting them to the table of God through you and their relationship with you.

There are some very significant things about hospitality, whether you're giving or receiving it. First, when you welcome someone into your home or share a meal with them or give them a place to stay, you are, whether you recognize it or not, welcoming them into your safe place, your trusted inner circle space, the place where you likely relax and unwind.

the place where you and your immediate circle of loved ones and family gather. There's a level of community and intimacy that happens there.

And, we can recognize, it takes effort and it also takes intention. Second, inviting someone into your safe space says a couple of things, a few different things.

things. I trust you. I care about and for you. I want to meet some of your practical needs, whatever that looks like, even if that means giving up something that I have to make that possible for you.

[18:33] when we share hospitality with someone, we give from our time and our resources to make someone else feel special and included.

The third thing about hospitality, showing hospitality to someone else or having hospitality shown to you demonstrates an important connection there.

That there's a valued relationship, whether new or old, sometimes having family over may not feel like hospitality, but that's what it is.

So whether the relationship is a new one or an old one, showing hospitality means demonstrating meaning and significance to someone else.

Hopefully this is not a shock. Jesus modeled hospitality. He wouldn't let Peter wash feet until he had had his own washed by his rabbi.

[19:41] Jesus demonstrated care and compassion in tangible ways, and friends, that is hospitality. Jesus made it clear that also that people who identify themselves as his followers, raise your hand if you identify yourself as Jesus, don't raise your hand.

But Jesus made it very clear that people who identify themselves as his followers should, and I'm going to say must, show hospitality to others. Another theme we can recognize in this passage is I think the idea of our plans versus God's.

And you've heard me talk about this so many times over the years. The things that we want to do in our lives and with our plans versus the things that God has planned for us.

Paul's route to Rome could have been more direct. I don't know if you've thought about that at all. But instead it involved a very long and often dangerous path.

Paul faced opposition and even risk to his life from both his Jewish opponents and potentially even his Roman captors. To say nothing of all the dangers during these sea voyages, don't get me started on snake bites.

[21:10] Friends, in good times and bad, God always worked things for Paul's good. Maybe that's why he wrote about it. Paul recognized that in Romans 8.28, right?

We know that. And you can always trust that God will do the same for you. Have you gone through things in your life which were terrible and dark and miserable and would have traded for anything,

only to recognize years later, maybe decades later, that had you not had that experience, how could you relate to someone God has just whack, put right in your life?

Does it happen to you? It's happened to me. Do you ever stop and go, oh, right. Sometimes we don't always think about it, right?

I have good news and bad. God may not make you comfortable or even secure at times in your life, but he will provide you with lots of opportunities for you to do the work that he has called you to do. Friends, sometimes the circumstances of our lives don't follow an easy or even logical path. Can I get an amen? Amen. At least from our perspective, right?

[ 22 : 48 ] You've heard me also say that to me, our life is a tapestry, but we see it from the backside. We see the tangled threads, the mishmash of colors, nothing makes sense.

God sees the other side, a perfect masterpiece that he is trying to do with your life. can you remember times in your life with situations or circumstances where you had everything planned out?

Yeah? Then, things seem to go completely wrong, completely off the rails, in a direction you didn't anticipate and perhaps likely never wanted.

Can you recognize times in your life when your plans did not work out, did not pan out, but then the end result, when you looked back, turned out to be far, far better than you could have ever planned or directed yourself.

Friends, when we trust God with our plans and let his will be our guide, whatever happens will be, I promise you, his best for us and for you.

[ 24 : 09 ] ask God to show you the ways that you can share hospitality with someone else and whatever that looks like, whether that means sharing a meal, whether it means showing up to help them complete a chore or task, anybody moving?

Or just spending some time getting to know each other better. I've often thought in my Christian life over the years, whatever church I was at, I thought to myself, these are the people that I will spend eternity with, and yet, I don't know them that well.

Is that reality for you? It's not always easy, right? Some of us are introverts, some aren't. but my friends, my prayer for each of us is that we will be used by God to be both a blessing to others and then reciprocally be blessed by others as we travel this road together.

Amen.