

Acts 28:1–16

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[0 : 00] of that word. I want to take from my text today the final words that conclude verse 15.

Paul thanked God and took courage. Concerning the three scenes that are before us, they had an effect.

They mattered in this way. By the time Paul was to leave these scenes, he was able to thank God and had taken courage.

The first is active, the second is passive. He somehow was able to express gratitude to the creator of the heavens and the earth, even in the midst of his circumstances.

And it was the consequence of something that had been given to him, namely courage. Paul thanked God and took courage.

[1 : 17] What's the one thing necessary for courage? I think it's the presence of fear. We like to think that Paul is a man among men and never afraid, but we have been in Acts too long to know that.

And we have read the epistles to see that he went from place to place in fear and in much trembling. Paul was a fearful man, often afraid.

In fact, if you look at his run toward Rome, because he's arrived there today in our text, his run toward Rome launched in the fear of his own heart.

Take a look back, chapter 23 and verse 11, when he was now leaving the council of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem and was going to be on his way to Rome, that opening bookend of the narrative we conclude today, we read these words.

The following night, the Lord stood by him and said, take courage. Courage. The only other time this word on courage is used by Luke in Acts.

[2 : 38] Our text, Paul thanked God and took courage. 23 11, the Lord appeared to him and said, Paul, you need to take courage.

For as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify to me in Rome. And somewhere between 23 11 and 28 15, it happened for Paul.

Somewhere, somehow, he had courage to face what he knew was anticipated hardship.

I don't know where you are today. I don't know what you're facing down. Anyone in here in need of encouragement because there is a fear concerning your future?

A confidence of the mind that needs to settle the heart as you perhaps have considered giving up hope in regard to the road that he has put you on.

[3 : 40] If so, then you are in the very place of Paul. In need of courage. So what brings it? Let me put it differently.

What will enable you to leave here today thanking God and having received something from God? Three scenes. Three scenes. And they really fill out the fullness of everything that's transpired to Paul since chapter 23 and verse 11.

Scene 1. The thing which enabled him to take courage is simply this. Verses 1 to 6. He was still standing.

He took courage because he was still standing. He had seen through the circumstances of his own life and through the situations that God had brought him over.

[4 : 46] You've heard the song, He brought me over. Yeah, that's it. 28.1. And we were brought safely through.

Well, what was he brought through? Verse 1. When he landed on that island after the shipwreck and dried himself off, he didn't even know where he was.

It says there, we then learned that the island was called Malta. And I've told you before, my father coached in the NBA for 20 years and that he traveled quite a bit.

And there were mornings where he would wake up and literally have to ask himself, where am I? In what city? Where is this?

And pulling back the drapes and remembering where they had been the night before and the plane that had brought them to the next destination. He was able to square himself up.

[5 : 49] Paul had a shipwreck and was on an island. And it wasn't until after he was there that somebody was able to tell him, this is where you are. You are on the island of Malta.

Paul knew what it was like to be in a place that he did not know. I think of this perfect analogy for many who will be coming into this neighborhood, even this week, facing down the future and the fears which are misplaced or just present.

Paul arrived at a place he did not know. You ever been in a place you did not know? Had no plan to be there, but somehow you're there. Not only that, he wasn't only in a place he did not know, he was in the midst of a people who spoke a language he did not speak.

The word here is interesting, the native people, verse 2, which is also repeated in verse 4, the native people.

It's one of these occasions in Acts where you have this Greek-sounding barbarian-like word, this murmuring upon murmuring, this babbarbering word, this people who spoke neither Greek nor Latin.

[7 : 21] They weren't familiar. They spoke a different tongue. It's in a place he did not know, among a people whose language he did not speak.

Just think of it. Think of it. Think of the student population that's coming into the neighborhood.

Think of the immigrant population in our country.

Think of the fear that emerges when you're asked to speak in a tongue that you do not know. Think of it.

Think of it. Six or seven visits among them for weeks and weeks and weeks and weeks on end. And every time I get on the plane, I have to relearn how to say, hello, my name is Dave.

I couldn't do it for you this morning. There you go. Somebody's got it. Paul is among people he does not easily communicate with.

[9 : 07] And third, he's now accused of something that was not his fault. There's an accusation he did not deserve, a language he did not speak, a place he did not know.

And yet God brought him through. Look at the accusation. There's a fire being kindled. There was an unusual kindness and welcome.

There was a cold that had set in. Nothing worse than being wet and cold and in need of warmth.

Put differently, nothing worse than being in England in springtime. And so Paul begins to gather a bundle of sticks, puts them on the fire, a viper, a snake, a serpent.

Either comes out of the midst of a log, having been hiding in there. Or perhaps was bundled up amidst the logs when put in there.

[10 : 13] And suddenly it is on his hand. The heat rises and it fastens on his hand. It doesn't actually indicate that it bit him, although it may have bit him.

But at any rate, when he put his stuff on the fire and pulled himself back, a serpent was dangling from his arm. He shakes it back into the fire and the locals fear for his life.

In fact, their gods would say, this man who God saw him through cannot escape the hand of the almighty God of justice.

He may have gotten himself out of one storm, but not this one. They thought he was going to die. In fact, they said, no doubt this man is a murderer.

Justice finally caught up with him. And yet it says he suffered no harm. They waited for him to swell or suddenly fall down dead.

[11 : 20] But when they waited a long time and they saw no misfortune to him, they changed their minds to say that he was a god. What's going on here?

What happens here is not a miracle that Paul performed. This is not snake handling, miracle performing works that demonstrate he is of the almighty God and greater than their gods.

This is not something that was performed by him. This is protection that God granted to him. What would make Paul take courage?

What would make Paul thank God? That God had seen him through. That he was still standing. That he could testify.

That he'd been places. He'd been through things. He'd been in situations that, for all practical purposes, he shouldn't have come out alive on.

[12 : 29] And yet, the gates opened. The waters receded. The situation changed. And he was still standing.

I would think I would have a witness on that one today. When you look back to your past, the fact that you are standing is a means by which you take courage.

Many people, even in our own midst, know what it is to be incarcerated and perhaps even without cause. But God has put you on the other side of that.

Or a situation, a natural consequence that, for all practical purposes, you should have been killed. I don't know if it was a car that they showed you the picture of the wreck afterward.

I don't know if it was a cliff upon which a 30-foot fall actually was something you went down on. I don't know if you've had a parent look you in the eye and go, it is a miracle that you're still here.

[13 : 34] But you are still standing. For Paul, that was a source of courage and strength.

When I look at my own history, I'm amazed I'm here. For a lot of reasons. First of all, my own wayward soul intended to put me in a lot of other places.

Indeed, I even found some of those places. But this morning I woke up and found myself here. I've had things happen in my life where I didn't have to come out alive.

But I did. Not by some miracle I performed. Simply by the protection that God gave. What Paul knows beyond a shadow of a doubt is that God has showed kindness to him.

He has brought him over. But not only that, scene two, notice how it shifts from that snake-like scene to this great estate among the people.

[14 : 55] Now in the neighborhood, verse 7, of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, Publius. The man among men.

Think of the public. Think of the common man. Think of this being the man for the common man. This was the man of the people. And he had a large estate.

He had many lands. And Paul moves from the sands of the beach to the estate of the wealthiest. One among the whole island.

The one who actually provided for those who were on the island. And notice what he was doing while he was there. He wasn't just still standing.

He was still sharing the good news of the gospel. Interestingly here, it indicates that that chief man received us and entertained us hospitably for three days.

[16 : 07] And it happened that his father lay sick with a fever and dysentery and Paul visited him and prayed and put his hands on him and healed him.

And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured. Now this is a miraculous work done by Paul.

Paul took courage by verse 15 not only because he was still standing but not only because he'd been brought over but because God continued to make him useful.

And he does that with you. There are plans on the script of God that are mysterious and unknown that will take you to places you do not know and set you among tongues that you do not speak and make you the recipient of accusations that you do not deserve and yet in the midst of that he wants you to be useful.

Now I'm not talking about you doing miracles. miracles. This is of course Paul an apostle and the miracles all the way through Acts have been a demonstration of apostolic genuineness.

[17 : 37] So that what Paul is doing here at the end of his ministry is very like what Jesus gave the twelve to be doing at the beginning of ministry.

so that they were sent out by him given power to preach and proclaim but also perform miracles in light of him that the world might realize that the inbreaking of God's kingdom had come among them.

And this is what Paul was demonstrating. He was doing the work of an apostle of an eyewitness of someone who could validate the security and the sincerity of the Christian message.

And he was doing it. God was making him useful. It's really worth pausing for a moment to understand that Luke closes down the narrative of Acts with Paul doing miracles in the same even in the context of a serpent that where God had provided protection and what Jesus had done to the twelve and the seventy two back in Luke nine and ten.

He sent out the twelve and the seventy two and when the seventy two did their work of ministry one of the indications that Jesus says upon their return is that scorpions and serpents will not harm you.

[19 : 14] And in that sense it wasn't that they were going to be doing snake handling miracles or cures like Paul does here but that rather God was with you. I mean we just sang it.

I am with you says God and Paul knew it. He had been made useful and not only was he doing miracles he was also preaching and proclaiming this is important for you to see.

Notice the word there received. Publius who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days. What does it mean to receive someone and to be hospitable toward someone?

They're not the same thing. Especially in Luke. The word for receive in Luke is almost entirely bound up with the word believe in Luke.

To receive Paul meant to believe in the message proclaimed by Paul. I mean let me show it to you. This goes all the way back and it's worth taking a look at.

[20 : 22] In Luke chapter 9 and 10 in Luke chapter 9 verse 51 the days draw near for Jesus to go to Jerusalem and he sends messengers ahead and it says verse 53 the people did not receive him.

What does that mean? Well look across the column at chapter 10 and verse 8 Jesus says whenever you enter a town and they receive you eat what is set before you heal the sick say to them the kingdom of God has come near you but whenever you enter a town and they do not receive!

you!!!! To not receive Paul is to reject the preaching of Paul and so when it says here that this great man among the men the common man for the common men received Paul it means he believed in what was going on so Paul is actually at the end of his life still sharing the gospel and still seeing the effect of it among people in other words God was making him useful why are you here today there are things for you to do there's a work for you to accomplish in fact you will never die a premature death there is no way you will go before your call there is no such thing in life of a believer a premature exit from the world it doesn't mean that you won't go early but it does mean that he'll never take you before your time and

Paul had been on the script of God's will called to preach the gospel clearly all the way to Rome and he's still doing it even as he's on this island right before he arrives how did Paul take courage what what gave Paul courage he knew this I'm still standing and I'm still speaking he I take courage because he brought me over and he's making me useful third he took courage verses 11 to 16 because he had been strengthened still standing still speaking but the recipient of strengthening and how did that come take a look at 11 and following three months we set sail in a ship a ship of a twin gods as a figure head

I love that detail did you notice how the people's gods also appeared in the first scene where they felt that justice was going to not allow their god of justice would not allow Paul to live having been bitten so what you have are scenes on either end where the gods of the people are actually out in front here on the prow of the ship but in the midst of the gods God is in the midst so what's happening is Paul's God is using him Paul's God is ministering to others and here he is being carried along by a ship with gods and yet what's happening to him is he is being strengthened by the god notice there in verse 13 that city there put put put put a put a put a is actually about 170 miles south of rome i've never been to italy i want to go i want to see the vineyards for myself i want to see rome i want to see the appian way i i'm still restricted to google earth and bible atlases so i went to rome this week but it was simply on a bible atlas and i know now that that is the port city that's about 160 miles south of rome and it was an important city and from there he would have made his way all the way to rome and i know that that these places are when he lands there what's really interesting is there were brothers there and they invited!

[24 : 57] them to stay with them for seven days he says and so we came to rome what strengthened him christian fellowship community hospitality i mean you can't miss this verse 14 there we found the brothers and were invited to stay with them and the brothers there when they heard about us now this is really interesting verse 15 we're not it's not quite sure whether he had gone to rome which would have meant going through the form of appius and three taverns along the way three taverns wonderful little town though huh have you spent any time in three taverns it's about 30 miles south of rome appius would have been about 40 miles south so it's hard to tell by the reading whether Paul had just gone through knew that he had arrived there so then they follow him there or if

Luke is basically saying look by the time he hit Italy he was home he was home he arrived at Rome even though he's 160 miles south that that's equally plausible I remember getting off a plane on an international trip and as soon as I landed in New York I was home and when Paul got into that port

city he was in Rome and so then it says again though that these folks come who see him from 30 and 40 miles away and they actually come from as far to meet with him hey this is this is Christian hospitality you got to see this look even in our own text verse two the native people showed unusual kindness to us verse seven Publius received us and hospitably verse ten they honored us greatly and when we were about to sail they put on board whatever we needed verse fourteen we were invited to stay with people and and then people came to meet with us hey if you take all the way back to 23 it's incredible

Paul had been the recipient of others hospitality and help and kindness along the way how did you get here not by you along the way Paul had help from a Roman tribune three times saved his life Paul had help from Felix who protected him even when he was in the midst of incarceration Paul had help from the brothers even a nephew a young nephew who saved his life Paul had help from everywhere and God brings you help and he does it through hospitality let me tell you something if you're here today and you have never been in Chicago and you're wondering whether God is here let me answer it for you when someone in this congregation says you want to come to my house for dinner God walked in before you even knew it there is help and hospitality that actually will enable you to thank God I'm in a place I've never been among people

I do not know! and suddenly find myself sitting in a living room receiving hospitality this is a beautiful thing it is impossible for us to miss the role that others play in helping us get strong let me let me shut it down there's something for you to thank God for you got something to thank God for man you you still standing there's something that God wants to make you useful for you ought to still be speaking there's something that will strengthen you the very people who are around you and your own initiative to show unusual kindness and hospitality to those that you do not know let me let me shut it down with these three questions

I've been thinking about these three questions in regard to these three scenes the way we greet each other verses one to six falls under the question hey man where you been where you been so if you only knew I've been some places but God brought me over verses seven to eleven what you been up to oh what have I been up to in the most unusual ways I'm still sharing still speaking still being made useful third question how you doing how am I doing well by the grace of God and the help of others who don't even know God and by the hospitality of those who do know God I'm doing fine Paul thank God because

[30 : 34] Paul had taken on courage and he would need it because there was plenty of things in the future to yet fear our heavenly father we pray that you would you would meet many today through you