

Intro:

I confess I am not a person that necessarily enjoys traveling or least I often fail to slow down and enjoy the journey itself. I am the type of person who is so fixed on the destination that anything between me and the destination can become perceived as an obstacle or distraction.

But you know, sometimes those obstacles and distractions, those annoying detours which include storms and yes even snake bites are an important part of the journey. I pray that as we further examine these obstacles in Paul's journey, we can be encouraged in our own journeys, knowing that God has us on regardless of what the individual circumstances may look like at the moment.

Acts 28:1–10 (NKJV) — **1** Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta. **2** And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold. **3** But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand. **4** So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, “No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live.” **5** But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. **6** However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god. **7** In that region there was an estate of the leading citizen of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days. **8** And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him. **9** So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed. **10** They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary.

[Open in Prayer](#)

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In chapter 27, Paul and company left the port of Fair Havens aboard the Alexandrian ship, attempting to sail just 40 miles west up the Cretan coast in order to find a safer harbor for the winter. That attempt turned into a 14-day nightmare for all 276 people on board the ship. **You might say they encountered a 500-mile detour. At least 500 miles from their immediate plans, but not God's.**

But all was not without hope - Along the journey Paul was assured by an angel of God that they all would survive the storm, yet the angel revealed that they would end up ship-wrecked on a certain Island.

After spotting an island, in desperation, the crew set course for the beach, but the ship ended up running aground on the reef and was therefore destroyed by the pounding waves forcing all to abandon the ship and swim to shore.

Now this **would not have been a pleasant swim by any means** as they were **still in the middle of the storm** and so even the swim it's self would had been dangerous, especially for those unable to swim.

Everyone made it safely to the shore Cold and exhausted, but only with their own lives and the clothes on their backs.

And so we start in Chapter 18.

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Acts 28:1–2 (NKJV) — 1 Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta. **2** And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold.

Having escaped the danger of the storm, they found themselves shipwrecked at the Island of Malta or as **some of the translations use the name of Malita.**

Slide 4 - Show map of Malita

Malta was a small island about 20 miles long and 10-12 miles wide. The origin of its name means “refuge” which was so fitting for those aboard this Alexandrian ship.

It was totally by the **Grace and Mercy of God that the ship came upon Malta** being that the **distance of the open waters between Sicily and Libya was 375** miles and yet the ship ran ashore on the reef of this island that was only 12 miles wide. (See map)

Slide 5 (See Satellite map from Google Earth)

Slide 6 - Transition to slide 6 to show route

The ship **could have easily missed the island of Malta** putting it even further out in the Mediterranean Sea to wonder aimlessly until it capsized in the storm. But God in His mercy brought the ship to Malta.

I think that **God’s mercy was in some ways actually just as great if not greater towards the islanders of Malta in that the Good News of the Gospel was brought to them by way of this storm and shipwreck.**

The island itself was basically a massive rock of white soft freestone. Topsoil had been transferred to Malta from the Island of Sicily which enabled the production of cotton and fruits. The Island also became well known for their fine honey. As it turns out the modern name of **Melita actually means honey.**

It tells us in verse 2 that the natives showed the survivors unusual kindness by building a large bonfire to welcome all the unexpected guests.

Some of the translations refer to the **natives as barbarians**. Not in the sense of being primitive violent people. Even though they were **heathens who were without a true understanding of who God was, they were a civil and cultivated people**.

Barbarian was a term used for anyone who did not speak Greek. Their language would have most likely been the ancient language used by **the Phoenicians who originated from the Eastern shores of the Mediterranean (modern day Lebanon)**. But the land was so arid and inhospitable that the Phoenicians left and became great travelers of the sea.

History note:

- *Malta was under rule of Rome during the shipwreck but eventually fell under the rule of Great Britain until its liberation in 1964*

The winter temperatures in the Adriatic Sea range normally from **54-57 degrees F** dropping as low as **48 degrees**. And therefore, these survivors greatest immediate need would have been warmth as **Hypothermia can begin to happen in water temperatures of 60 degrees or lower**. So, these natives sought to bring comfort to all 276 survivors initially through the warmth of a fire.

Dr Luke notes that the natives **showed unusual kindness** towards the people.

The NASB uses the word extraordinary, describing their kindness.

Application:

Anything that is extraordinarily good in our lives is always done at the hand of God. In their situation God caused the Islander's to show unusual kindness towards not only Paul, but all those who were with him. Certainly, all the events of the past two weeks including having the ship crushed in the reef were not beyond the hand of God.

I quote Romans 8:28 very often. But that is because it is promise that I hold to so often, to help me get through the storms in life.

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Romans 8:28 (NKJV) — 28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

You know that term “all things” includes all detours in our lives? Yes, even shipwrecks.

This favor went far beyond just building a fire. The islanders **provided all provisions and shelter for all 276 people for the remaining duration of the winter** as well as everything needed to get to their next destination.

This reminds me of how God caused the Egyptians to look on the people of Israel with favor so that they sent Israel out with a large amount of silver and gold as they headed out to the promise land.

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Exodus 11:2–3 (NKJV) — 2 Speak now in the hearing of the people, and let every man ask from his neighbor and every woman from her neighbor, articles of silver and articles of gold.” **3** And the LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians.....

In a like manner, Paul and those with him were given favor by the islanders. **But have you ever noticed that when you are standing in the blessings of God, that the enemy is not far behind?**

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3 But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand. **4** So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, “No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live.” **5** But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. **6** However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.

Paul **being a true servant, was gathering more fuel for the bonfire**, not knowing that a snake was lying dormant in some of the brush he was handling. **Pauls ends up struck by the snake as he put the brush on the fire.**

The scripture says it was a viper which is just a certain class of venomous snake.

It says the snake fastens itself to Paul’s hand. And as he stands with this snake hanging off of his hand, the reaction from the Islander’s make it very apparent that this is **not just some harmless type variety garden of snake but is was a poisonous snake.**

The venom from a poisonous snake attacks the body in one of three ways; through cardiovascular system, through the neurological system, or through the muscular system. If left untreated, any one of the affects from the venom can result in death. **In this situation, the islanders expected Paul’s death to come very quickly.**

Adversity:

Paul’s life was likely in greater danger at this point that it was during the storm. But he doesn’t panic. Instead he shakes the snake off his hand into the fire as if there was nothing to worry about.

One thing that you could certainly say about Paul was that he was no stranger to adversity in his life and in his ministry. **His very call into ministry came with the promise that he was going to endure suffering.**

Jesus told Ananias of what lie ahead for Paul: in that **He** would show Paul how many things he must suffer for His name’s sake.”

Those words proved to be true in Paul’s life.

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2 Corinthians 11:24–27 (NKJV) — 24 From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. **25** Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been

in the deep; **26** in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; **27** in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting's often, in cold and nakedness—

Throughout the sufferings and hardships, **Paul learned to trust the Lord. Even in the most discouraging of circumstances.**

The key was that **Paul learned that God was faithful**, no matter what the situation looked like. Even having a poisonous snake latched to his hand.

Application:

You know, I don't think most of us will actually ever experience getting bitten by a poisonous snake.

But if that has you worried, let me share a fact with you to put your mind at ease: according to the University of Florida, **fewer than 1: 37,500 people will be bitten by a poisonous snake this year**. Statistically that is bad news for approximately 2 people in Rio Rancho this year.

For most of us it comforting to know that we probably not something that we have to worry about. **But how often do we experience being bitten in a different way? You see, there are storms in your life and then there are snake bites.**

This kind of snake bite comes in the form of a sharp criticism, slander, rumor, a lie, or maybe as a form of persecution or anything thing that could cause us to question and doubt the promises of God.

The strike can come in many different forms, but this type of venom always serves the same purpose. **To spiritually paralyze us.** It attacks our **faith**, and our **hope** and brings about **discouragement**, and **bitterness and it even blurs our vision of seeing God's promises.**

The damage from this type of venom depends on our immediate response. When snake bitten the immediate need is always an antidote to that venom.

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Webster's 1828 dictionary:

Antidote

AN'TIDOTE, *noun* [against, to give.]

1. A medicine to counteract the effects of poison, or of any thing noxious taken into the stomach.
2. Whatever tends to prevent mischievous effects, or to counteract the evil which something else might produce.

The ultimate antidote against the enemy's attacks in our lives the gospel itself. The very promises of God's love and provisions for us.

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Romans 8:31–35 (NKJV) — 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? **32** He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? **33** Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. **34** Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. **35** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

So, when slander or unfair criticisms or bullying or any form of evil attacks come your way, **are you going to allow that venom to poison your heart and mind?** Or are you going to turn to the love of Christ?

I think of the example of Elijah as recorded in 1 Kings chapters 18 and 19.

God did some mighty things through Elijah in these chapters. It ceased to rain for 3 years at the prayer of Elijah. During this drought, God miraculously provided food for him by first ravens, and then through a widows perpetual jars of flour and oil that sustained enough food for the widow, her son, and Elijah for until the rain was restored, yet there was only enough in the jars for 1 meal. When the widow’s son died, God allowed Elijah to raise him from the dead.

Elijah was victorious in his challenge against the 450 prophets of Baal as he challenged them to have their god reign down fire on their sacrifice. After almost a full day of them calling out for Baal, nothing happened to their sacrifice and so Elijah saturated the alter in which he had placed his sacrifice with 12 barrels of water even filling the trench which he dug around the alter. And at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, Elijah prayed to God and fire from the Lord fell on the alter and consumed the burnt offering even lapping up the water in the trench. Then Elijah overtook all 450 prophets of Baal and put them to the sword.

These were some significant victories in Elijah’s ministry. But then suddenly in the midst of victory, boom, just like that. Elijah was snake bit. Not literally but in the form of a message that he received from Jezebel. King Ahab’s wicked wife.

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1 Kings 19:1–4 (NLT) — 1 When Ahab got home, he told Jezebel everything Elijah had done, including the way he had killed all the prophets of Baal. **2** So Jezebel sent this message to Elijah: “May the gods strike me and even kill me if by this time tomorrow I have not killed you just as you killed them.” **3** Elijah was afraid and

fled for his life. He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah, and he left his servant there. **4** Then he went on alone into the wilderness, traveling all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. **“I have had enough, LORD,” he said. “Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died.”**

Look at Elijah’s response. **After God had done all these miracles through Elijah’s hand. He allows himself to become paralyzed by a simple threat from Jezebel.** Not only hiding but even getting into such a state of despair that he desired his own life to end. *Elijah allowed the venom of the enemy to overtake him.*

He forgot that as much power as Jezebel had, she was not more powerful than God. The God **who could stop or bring the rain.** The God who had the **power to give or take human life.** The **God who could miraculously bring every provision** and could reign fire down from heaven.

The venom from Jezebel caused Elijah to lose sight of **who it was that he served** and therefore became quickly paralyzed and discouraged.

When snake bitten, **not if but when**, can you trust that God has the situation under control? Consider that maybe, just maybe, God has allowed that circumstance in your life because he is going to use it either to help you grow or maybe to help someone else grow through your experience.

This so often where we can miss out on the journey. **God has a plan and used all kinds of situations to unroll that plan.**

But only as we trust God and allow Him to roll out His master plan, do we begin to **see how He is at work weaving the Gospel not only into the fabric of our own lives but also the fabric of the lives around us.** And this often takes place through what initially seems like the most unfortunate of circumstances. Like shipwrecks and snakebites, bad backs, cancer, loss of employment, marriage troubles, and yes even tragic deaths of a loved one.

But that is just it. **Is there really such a thing as unfortunate circumstances for the believer?**

The very definition of unfortunate would imply being un-prosperous.

How can anything be un-prosperous at the hand of God? After all, He is the master sculptor.

I am not asking are there hard circumstances. I am asking are there any circumstances in our lives that are beyond the reach of God? **Beyond the promise that He works all things to the good.** Is there any situation that you could find yourself in that you could not put your absolute full trust and assurance in God?

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Psalms 139:7–10 (NLT) — 7 I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! **8** If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there. **9** If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, **10** even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me.

Though Paul was able to easily shake off the events of the snake bite, the natives were still trying to understand it all.

They immediately recognized the danger that Paul was in and therefore **they initially reasoned** among themselves, that the situation was brought about by justice. Discussing among themselves, that justice was not going to allow Paul to live. **But this was in reference to their own mythology.**

Justice was the name of a goddess, who was supposedly the daughter of Zeus and Themis. Their mythology taught that Justice was responsible to ensure that the guilty were judged.

Moral relativism would deny that there are universal morals shared by every human society. Insisting that there is not an objective external standards for what is right and wrong.

Yet here is a group of people who are really uninformed about God other than His natural revelation shown by the creation around them. These people had no understanding of the gospel or Christianity. **They have no Bible to learn a standard of righteousness from, yet they have a sense of right and wrong and they understand that justice demands a penalty for evil.**

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Romans 2:14–15 (NLT) — **14** Even Gentiles, who do not have God’s written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it. **15** They demonstrate that God’s law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right.

These people understand a standard of right and wrong, **but they erred in that they believe that calamity is always the result of evil.**

This was the same error of the disciples themselves when they were with Jesus when they encountered the man who was born blind.

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John 9:1–3 (NKJV) — **1** Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. **2** And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” **3** Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.

Jesus revealed that the man’s blindness was for the purpose of God being glorified through him being healed.

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The Bible identifies several reasons we suffer that have nothing to do with our own sin, although suffering is ultimately caused by being in a sin-cursed world. Sometimes

suffering is designed to make us more dependent upon God, sometimes to make us stronger in our faith, sometimes to accomplish a greater good through your life, sometimes it's to bring us witnessing opportunities, and sometimes it's just to bring glory to God in some mysterious way.

Chuck Sleigh

In this situation the Islanders initially thought that justice had caught up to Paul, but after nothing bad happens to him, they then swing that pendulum to the other extreme and reasoned among themselves that he was a god.

But can you blame them? They were just interpreting the events through what they understood.

As pagans they didn't understand one true living God. Is all that they knew is that a miracle has happened by the fact that Paul did not die. At least they were open to the fact that something miraculous had happened. That is more than many of the religious Jews had done throughout Paul's or even Jesus's ministries.

The situation with the poisonous snake certainly puts all eyes on Paul. He most certainly had their attention. I believe that was God's plan all along. Certainly, the situation would have given credibility to the sharing of the gospel, as these natives witnessed the presence of something supernatural.

Slide 18

7 In that region there was an estate of the leading citizen of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days. **8** And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went into him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him. **9** So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed. **10** They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary.

Publius was leading citizen, meaning he was the Roman governor of Malta. And he was proven quite generous in his hospitality in that he opened his estate to supply food and lodging for 276 strangers for three days.

You know it is one thing to open your home to a few people, or maybe a whole family, but can you imagine opening your home to 276 guests? One thing that goes through my mind is that must have been some kind of estate.

Notice how God orchestrated the events so that when shipwreck happened in the general area of Publius's own estate. And then God opened Publius's heart so that he hosted all 276 people for three days while they made other arrangements to house them for the remainder of winter.

And so, Paul learned that Publius's father lay ill, stricken with a **re-accruing fever and dysentery**. I will spare you the medical details of his condition other than to say that it was an intestinal disease that if left untreated, could have potentially become life threatening due to dehydration.

But Paul first prays for Publius's father and then lays his hands on him to bring about healing. **Not healing by Paul's strength, but healing by the power of the Holy Spirit.**

This was not something that was only to be done by the hands of someone who was an apostle as so many believe, even today.

Jesus told his disciples that there would be certain signs to accompany anyone who believes:

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Mark 16:17–18 (NLT) —17 These miraculous signs will accompany those who believe: They will cast out demons in my name, and they will speak in new languages. **18** They will be able to handle snakes with safety, and if they drink anything poisonous, it won't hurt them. They will be able to place their hands on the sick, and they will be healed."

And we are told that after the healing of Publius's father, word went through out the Island and those who were diseased, came and received healing.

As I said earlier, God's mercy was possibly even greater towards the residence of Malta because within the circumstance of the shipwreck, in that **both physical and spiritual Healings were brought to the natives. I truly believe this was God's plan all along.**

Now as much as God cared about healing their diseases, *His greater concern would have been healing their souls.*

According to tradition, Publius, became the first Bishop of Malta following his conversion to Christianity and ruled the Maltese Church for 31 years: Wikipedia

And Vs. 10 tells us that at the end of winter, all the provisions were provided for the remainder of their journey.

What started out to be such a nightmare, turned out to be a 3-month pit stop. Consider the crazy arrangement of circumstances that played out in bringing the gospel to Malta.

You know, we have such a limited understanding and view of what is really happening in our lives.

How much different do you think Paul and those with him would have felt about the circumstance they experienced on their trip, if they would of had the benefit of knowing how everything was going to play out beforehand?

I think they would have enjoyed the journey a little more for sure. And that should be a lesson for us.

And even though we will never have the full picture this side of heaven, we can put our full trust in the one who does!

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Jeremiah 29:11 (NLT) — 11 For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

God has a plan for your life. He knows what detours, shipwrecks and snake bites are going to become part of your journey, even when we don't. **So, the best thing that we all can do is buckle up, hang on and enjoy the journey. After all, we already know how it ends. With us eternally in heaven with Jesus.**

Close in prayer