

Summary

In this sermon, the pastor draws from Acts 28:1-10 and Matthew 5:13-16 to challenge believers to stop living by default and start living by design, according to the identity God has already placed on their lives. Using the story of Paul being bitten by a viper on the island of Malta, the pastor illustrates that being bitten, broken, or bruised does not disqualify you from being used by God. Just as Paul shook the snake off into the fire and then used those same hands to heal others, believers are called to boldly confront the things in their lives that are holding them back rather than passively tolerating them. The pastor also unpacks Jesus's declaration in Matthew 5 that believers are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Salt in the first century was incredibly valuable, used for preservation, covenant-making, and payment. In the same way, God calls His people to be valuable, set apart, and active in keeping decay out of the world around them. The sermon closes with a call from 1 Corinthians 15 to be steadfast and immovable, reminding the congregation that their labor in Christ is never in vain and that God is calling each person to open every area of their life to Him, discover their God-given identity, and step boldly into their calling.

Intro Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come before You today grateful for the time we have together. We ask that You quiet our minds and open our hearts to what You want to speak to each of us in this room. Help us to set aside our distractions, our fears, and our pride, and to be truly present with one another and with You. Lord, we do not want to simply go through the motions. We want to encounter You in a real and meaningful way. Speak to us, shape us, and lead us into the truth You have for us today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Ice Breaker

What is one thing about yourself that most people in this group might not know?

Key Verses

- Acts 28:1-10
- Matthew 5:13-16
- 1 Corinthians 15:56-58

Questions

- In Acts 28, the people on the island quickly judged Paul as a murderer when the snake bit him, but then called him a God when nothing happened. Have you ever experienced people making quick judgments about you based on your circumstances? How did that affect you?
- Paul shook the snake off into the fire without hesitation. What are some 'snakes' in your own life that you have been tolerating instead of shaking off? What has made it hard to let them go?
- The pastor said that Paul used the same hand that was bitten to later heal others. How has God used a painful or broken season in your life to bring healing or encouragement to someone else?
- Jesus says in Matthew 5:13 (ESV), 'You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?' What do you think it looks like practically for a Christian to lose their saltiness in today's world?
- The pastor described salt as something that preserves and keeps decay away. In what ways do you feel called to be a preserving influence in your family, workplace, or community?
- The pastor said, 'Your identity will either be shaped by design or by default.' What does it mean to you to discover your God-given identity rather than choosing or creating one on your own?
- 1 Corinthians 15:58 (ESV) says to be 'steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.' Where in your life do you feel like your efforts for God are going unnoticed or feel pointless? How does this verse speak to that?
- The pastor mentioned that discouragement has taken out more Christians than the devil ever has. How do we as a small group create a culture where we build each other up rather than tear each other down?

Life Application

This week, identify one area of your life that you have been holding back from God, whether it is a habit, a relationship, a fear, or a secret struggle. Take a specific and intentional step to surrender that area to Him. This might look like a honest conversation with a trusted friend, a time of prayer where you specifically name that thing before God, or a practical decision to walk away from something that has been biting you. Come back next week ready to share what that step looked like for you.

Key Takeaways

- Being broken or bitten does not disqualify you from being used by God. Paul used the same hand that was bitten by the viper to heal others, showing that God redeems our wounds for His purposes.
- God calls believers to boldly shake off the things that are harming them rather than passively praying over sin and destructive patterns without taking action.
- Your identity as a believer is not something you pick or create. It is something you discover, because God has already spoken over your life and set a calling in place for you.
- As the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16, ESV), Christians are called to be valuable, set apart, and actively working to preserve what is good and push back decay in the world around them.
- Discouragement and fear of what others think are among the greatest threats to a believer's calling. The church is meant to be a place where people strengthen one another and labor together, knowing that work done in Christ is never in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58, ESV).

Ending Prayer

Lord, thank You for this time together and for the truth of Your Word. We confess that there are areas in our lives where we have been living by default instead of by design, where we have tolerated things we should have shaken off, and where we have hidden our light instead of letting it shine. Forgive us, and give us the courage to step into the identity and calling You have already placed on our lives. Help us to be the salt of this earth, preserving what is good and keeping decay at bay in our homes, our relationships, and our communities. Remind us that our labor in You is never in vain, and that You can use even our broken and bitten places for Your glory. Strengthen us to stand together, to build each other up, and to keep pressing forward. We love You, Lord. In Jesus' name, amen.