

Given Grace to Extend Grace

Acts: The Spirit Moving / Acts 28:1-11 / October 11, 2026

Introduction:

This morning, we come to a set of short stories that highlight interactions Paul has with the natives of a small island they found themselves shipwrecked on before their final travels to Rome. In Acts 27, Luke drew us into the story with thorough details, but it is the missing details that do so this week. Notice first how Luke sets the stage in verses 1-3, “After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta. 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.” Luke reminds us of God’s provision before sharing the island they landed on. Malta was 470 miles away from Rome and colonized around 1000 B.C. by the Phoenicians. Rome established control in 218 B.C. influencing it with Greek culture while it kept many Phoenician characteristics. Its Phoenician name meant “a place of refuge,” and is already functioning as such with the natives kindling a fire to provide heat in the cold rain. Note how Luke describes this as “unusual kindness.” This moves us to see God’s grace is at work behind this kindness. From here, Luke will focus on the two stories that build on each other. The first story shows us,

Assumptions of Justice Corrected

Pay attention to the details in verses 3-4. Look there with me, “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. 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.’” Paul immediately begins to help with the fire when a snake awakes from its frozen slumber and attacks him. And notice how Luke focuses on the native’s reactions. Pliny the Elder notes how people commonly believed all snakes were agents of divine vengeance (see Nat. Hist. 8.85–86), and the capitalization of “Justice” indicates they were likely speaking of a god. This could have been the Greek goddess Dikē, the personification of justice and revenge, or their own version. Here is where this gets interesting. This story reads like a familiar story from Greek Anthology. Statyllius Flaccus wrote of a shipwrecked sailor, “O, he escaped the storm and the raging of the murderous sea. But as he lay stranded in the Libyan sand, not far from the beach and heavy with sleep, at last, naked and destitute, weary as he was from the terrible shipwreck, the viper struck him dead. Why did he struggle against the waves? He did not escape the lot which was destined for him on land” (Palatine Anthology 7.290). The point of Flaccus’ story was to show the gods’ justice always finds the guilty and I’m persuaded Luke is alluding to this story to uniquely speak to his original readers. Notice what happens in verses 5-6, “He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. 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.” Paul doesn’t panic and just shakes the snake off into the fire. Then, we see the natives watching and wait for a long time for him to die because they assumed he was guilty. However, their assumptions of justice were corrected once nothing happened to Paul and they think he is a god instead. Before we continue, consider an application for us. Family, are we quick to assume every trouble experienced must be punishment or retribution for the wrongs we or someone has committed? In the story of Job, his friends make the same error insisting all that happened to him must have been punishment for sin. Yet, we are told Job was an upright and blameless man being attacked by Satan because of his righteousness, reminding us things are not always as they seem. Well, you might say, “but Ben, you don’t know what I have done. I am not righteous like Job.” You know what? That’s true. You are more righteous than Job, if you are in Christ. Because you are clothed in His righteousness. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” We are declared righteous by God because Christ bore our sin and received the wrath of God’s justice in our place.

And we need to remember God's justice has been fully satisfied in Jesus to keep us from living in the shame of our sin and, instead, move us to quickly confess it because we know God meets that confession with grace and never justice. This why we partake of communion. It reminds us of this gift of love and righteousness. It proclaims to our hearts that we are redeemed because Christ stood in our place. Family, like Job, we won't know every reason for our troubles. Some are simply the natural consequences of living in a fallen world. Others are the enemy's attack. Some, like Paul's, are opportunities for God's power to shine. And some are the Lord's discipline. But, regardless of the cause, you can rest assured God's justice is never chasing you down. Even God's discipline isn't the exercise of His justice, but the exercise of His great love because His justice was satisfied in Jesus. Now, did you notice something strikingly absent from this story? Paul doesn't rebuke them for saying he was a god. This may be because they didn't worship Paul or Luke is recording what they said to themselves, and Paul was unaware of it. Either way, I think it shows their perspectives were still off to build into the next story, where we see,

Perspectives of Power Redirected

Pay attention to how Luke keeps our minds on this story as he continues. Look at verse 7-10, "Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days." Pause there. "Now" intentionally progresses the narrative forward while keeping the previous story in view. Then, Luke ensures we understand it is in that same place, names either the Roman official or most prominent benefactor of the island and highlights similar hospitality show. This connects these two stories together. Continue in verse 8, "It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him, healed him. And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured. They also honored us greatly, and when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed. After three months we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead." This is a powerful story of the healing of Publius' sick father, followed by a greater healing poured out as all the diseased came and were healed. Then, immediately we see them providing for Paul as he departs and discover they were on the island for three months. I believe the key to understanding this story is seeing its echo of previous story Luke has shared. Look at Luke 4:38-44 with me, "And he [Jesus] arose and left the synagogue and entered Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and they appealed to him on her behalf. And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her, and immediately she rose and began to serve them. Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them. And demons also came out of many, crying, 'You are the Son of God!' But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ. And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them, but he said to them, 'I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.' And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea." Note, first, the similarities. Both stories involve a parent of the host healed from a fever, and the rest of the town coming and being healed as well. Yet, note the differences. In Luke 4, they appeal to Jesus for healing, where Paul is responding to the situation. Jesus rebuked the fever, where Paul prayed for the healing. Paul is thought to be a god, where Jesus is proclaimed to be the Son of God. Jesus immediately turns to preaching, Paul is just seen healing. Through this echo, I am persuaded Luke is showing two things. First, Paul used this opportunity to redirect their perspective onto Jesus' power. We aren't told, but what do you think his prayers focused on? There is no doubt in my mind they leaned on the power and authority of Jesus. Second, we should assume Paul followed Jesus' footsteps in preaching the good news of the kingdom. And I'm persuaded we may see the fruit of belief in verse 10, as they honor Paul and provide for his travels. Commentators note how sharing possessions is often a sign of sharing in the gospel in Acts (Johnson, Acts, p. 463). Paul often encouraged this in his letters.

In Romans 15:24, he says “I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.” Again in 2 Corinthians 1:16, “I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on my way to Judea.” And in Titus 3:13, telling the church to, “Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing.” Helped in Romans 15, send in 2 Corinthians 1, and speed in Titus 3:13 are similar Greek words that carry the idea of providing for their needs. Providing for gospel ministers commonly indicates a connection with their ministry, leading me to believe their provision for Paul is a subtle hint of the gospel bearing fruit. Either way, Paul redirected their perspective onto Christ, the healings attested to Jesus’ power, and they discovered Paul was simply an instrument in the hands of Christ. Consider with me what these stories call us to understand.

We are Given Grace to Extend Grace to Others

The grace Paul received from the hospitality of strangers and not being harmed by the snake was not simply for himself. It served to open the door to extend God’s grace to the natives on that island. Jesus has redeemed all of us to be instruments of extending his grace to others. Are you tempted to think God’s grace in the gospel only extends through special people? Or do you believe God intends to extend grace through you? See, I am persuaded this story is given in such a way to take the attention off of Paul and place it onto the power of God work to him and through him. Certainly, Jesus set Paul apart for His purposes, but you have been set apart for a purpose as well. 1 Peter 2:9 says, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” You have been redeemed to be His people who proclaim His excellencies. It is not just people like Paul, other missionaries, and pastors who receive grace to extend grace. It is every one of us. Oh family, I long for us to know how the Spirit can work through us. Maybe you are saying right now, “but I have nothing to offer.” Consider James 5:16-18, “The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.” We misunderstand this passage and think we need to be righteous for our prayers to be answered. Or we need to seek out prayer from a righteous person. But what makes a person righteous? Nothing in them. It is the blood of Jesus that declares them righteous. If you read the verses before this, James calls for confession of sins and praying for one another. I think he is saying that the prayer of those who cling to Christ’s righteousness, through confession and petitions, has great power as it is working. This is why he reminds us that Elijah had “a nature like ours.” It wasn’t anything special in Elijah that moved God to change the weather, it was his trust in the power of God. It wasn’t anything special in Paul to caused this moment in Malta, it was his prayers of trust in the power of God to extend grace through him. God accomplishes extraordinary things through ordinary people. Charles Spurgeon may be one of the greatest preachers of the 19th century. His conversion at 15 is a powerful story to remind us of this truth. A snowstorm caused him to enter a small chapel in Colchester, England one day. The minister wasn’t available that morning and a man believed to be a shoemaker or tailor preached on Isaiah 45:22, “Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.” This mans name is unknown, and Spurgeon says he was barely able to read the text properly, but it was through his preaching that God opened Spurgeon’s eye. And his impact on Spurgeon is still told to this day. Family, it is never about what you have to offer, it is the power of the Spirit moving in and through you. Maybe God will use you to save the next Charles Spurgeon. Do you know that God has given you, and will give you everything you need to extend His grace to others? 1 Peter 4:10-11 tells us, “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.” I’ve shared this before. A steward was a servant placed in charge of managing a masters house and distributing food to everyone.

God give each of us spiritual gifts to dispense His varied grace to others. He provides the words to say and supplies the strength to serve, so He may be glorified through Jesus Christ. All we do is walk forward in trust that He will work.

Conclusion:

As the worship team comes for our time of response, I want to encourage you to lean into the grace that flows to you and ask God to have it extend through you. Consider how this must have encouraged Paul. He had spent over 2 years under trials in Caesarea, and months at sea languishing against the violent storm, holding onto hope in God's promise. Then, as he lands on the beach, what appears to be a deadly snake bite turns into a marvelous opportunity to draw attention to the grace and power of Jesus. And as Paul faithfully stepped forward, continuing to entrust his life and ministry into the hands of the God to whom he belonged and worshipped, God chose to extend grace powerfully through him. Trust that the same God is at work in you. We have the same Spirit. We serve the same risen King Jesus. What might God do through your service and prayers for others? Might he choose to heal through you? Might he choose to save through your proclamation? Let's pray as we prepare to respond.