

To the Ends of the Earth, Part 4 – Acts 28:7-15

Main Idea: The Gospel will reach the ends of the earth as God demonstrates his kindness and fulfills his promises.

I. The Kindness | Acts 28:7-10

Following the shipwreck on Malta at the end of Acts 27, Paul and the 275 others experience God's providence through the hospitality of the island's people. Luke notes that they are met with "unusual kindness" (Acts 28:2) from the Maltese, a generosity that continues through Publius, the chief official of the island, likely a Roman-appointed governor. Publius welcomes Paul, Luke, and possibly others into his home for three days, an extraordinary act of hospitality given the large number of shipwrecked survivors. This act of kindness, though likely influenced by the superstitious culture of Malta – made evident earlier by the rapid change in their opinion of Paul from murder to god (Acts 28:4-6) - becomes a situation in which God displays His power and grace. **The hospitality of Publius, though not rooted in faith, mirrors a broader truth: God often uses the actions of unbelievers to accomplish His purposes (Genesis 50:20; Acts 4:27-28).** God uses Publius' hospitality to tend to the needs of his people and open a door for God's power and Gospel to be made known. The passage also challenges believers to reflect on their own hospitality. Scripture calls God's people to show selfless, sacrificial hospitality, not only to fellow believers but also to strangers, reflecting God's grace toward us in Christ (Romans 12:13; 1 Peter 4:8-9). The kindness of the Maltese, while generous, lacks the grounding of truth, which serves as a warning that "niceness" apart from Christ masks a deeper spiritual need (Isaiah 29:13). **True hospitality stems from a heart transformed by the Gospel and reflects God's love, is sacrificial, and seeks to glorify Him.**

When Publius' father falls ill with fever and dysentery - a severe intestinal infection often linked to the island's goat milk and in more severe cases could take a person's life within 10 days - Paul visits him, prays to God, and lays hands on him, which results in a miraculous healing. This act sparks a wave of healings across the island, as others with diseases come to Paul and are cured. The healings on the island of Malta serve as a platform for Paul to proclaim the Gospel. Miracles of the time served to validate the apostles and their teachings as being from God (2 Corinthians 12:12). While Luke doesn't explicitly state that this is what Paul did, healings coinciding with teachings is a pattern regularly evident throughout the New Testament (Mark 2:8-11; Acts 3:12-16). **This passage reveals God's kindness not as an end in itself, but as a means to draw people to repentance (Romans 2:4).** In contrast with a culture prone to idolatry and superstition, these miracles, performed through Paul's prayerful dependence on God, point the Maltese people to the one true God, not Paul himself. **This serves as a reminder for us that in every act of service and worship, our goal should be for God to receive glory, not ourselves (1 Cor. 10:31).** After a period of three months (v. 11), the Maltese people respond with great honor, providing Paul and his companions with all they need for their onward journey to Rome – a continued expression of God's kindness through the people of Malta.

To Ponder:

1. How have you seen God use the kindness of others—believers or unbelievers—to provide for you or open doors for the Gospel? What did you learn from those moments?
2. In what ways might you be hesitant to show hospitality, and how can reflecting on God's kindness in Christ help you to grow in this area?

II. The Kinship | Acts 28:11-15

After three months in Malta, waiting out the winter months for safer sailing conditions, Paul and his companions board an Alexandrian ship adorned with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux—Greek gods believed to have the power to protect sailors from the dangers of the sea. The figurehead was not merely a decoration, but a form of talisman. Sailors of the time believed they could earn the favor of the gods by placing their likeness on the figurehead of the ship. Once again, the superstitious behavior of man is confronted by God's sovereignty, which alone guides them safely to Syracuse, Rhegium, Puteoli, and finally Rome, fulfilling His promise to Paul (Acts 23:11; 27:24). **This kind of transactional view of the divine remains a danger for believers today. A right understanding of God's sovereignty and grace, guided by scripture and the Spirit, guards believers from attempting to earn God's favor by performance.** Behavior such as that of the sailors displays a "what's in it for me?" mentality that often turns Christianity into a disappointing chore list that hopes God will reward a person according to their desires. A heart that trusts in the Lord and his will for us will live a lifestyle that echoes the words of Jesus, "not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Paul stood in stark contrast to the mindset of the sailors. **His confidence rested not in rituals or symbols but in the promises of God (Acts 27:22-25).**

In Puteoli, a bustling port city on the Bay of Naples and a primary hub for trade and travel in the Roman Empire, Paul encounters believers who host him for seven days, providing rest and fellowship as he and the others make their final approach towards Rome. As Paul and the others make their long journey from Puteoli to Rome, Christians from the city travel 30–40 miles to meet him at the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns. These believers had likely heard of Paul through the letter he had written to the Roman church almost three years earlier. Their presence deeply encourages Paul, who thanks God and takes courage. These believers, whom Paul had longed to meet (Romans 1:9-12), demonstrate the kinship of God's family, united by faith in Christ despite never having met Paul in person. This passage underscores two truths. **First, God is faithful to His promises, bringing Paul to Rome despite storms, shipwrecks, and opposition. His sovereignty ensures that no obstacle can thwart His purposes (Philippians 1:6).** For Paul, this was not abstract, but a lived truth, in which every trial he experienced served God's purpose of bringing him exactly where he needed to be. **Second, the fellowship of believers is a powerful expression of God's kindness, providing encouragement and strength for His people.** This time spent with the believers at Puteoli and outside of Rome is a divine gift that reminds us of God's kindness towards us in Christ. Paul's weary heart is uplifted by the presence of these Christians, reminding us that God designed His church to be a family where mutual love and encouragement reflect His love to the world (John 13:35; Hebrews 10:24-25). **Christian fellowship is not optional but essential, calling us to invest in relationships that build up the body of Christ and bear witness to the Gospel.**

To Ponder:

1. How does God's faithfulness in fulfilling His promise to bring Paul to Rome challenge you to trust His promises laid out in the Bible? (Consider everything Paul went through during the journey.)
2. Biblically, how does the church's love and encouragement for one another serve as a witness to the world?
3. What steps can you take to prioritize Christian fellowship, and how might this strengthen both you and others in your church community?