

To the Ends of the Earth, Part 3 – Acts 27:39-28:6

Main Idea: The Gospel will reach the ends of the earth—not because storms are stilled, but because God is sovereign in the midst of them.

I. The Solution | Acts 27:39-44

The final chapters of Acts offer more than just a historical documentation of Paul's ministry—they reveal **the unshakable hope of a man whose confidence was anchored not in favorable circumstances or popular consensus, but in the providential hand of God**. Paul had prayed and planned for years to reach Rome. His desire wasn't for sightseeing or political influence, but to strengthen believers, reap a spiritual harvest, and preach Christ at the heart of the empire. Despite delays, imprisonments, and opposition, Paul's hope remained fixed—not on outcomes, but on the God who ordains them. The end of Acts 27 brings us to the climax of Paul's harrowing sea voyage. After two terrifying weeks at sea, battered by a relentless storm, the ship carrying Paul and others approaches an unfamiliar bay. The sailors, desperate for survival, attempt to run the vessel ashore. **Despite the chaos, this passage powerfully displays God's providence, human responsibility, and the importance of trust in His promises**. Earlier in Acts 27:23-24, Paul shared that an angel of the Lord had promised he would stand before Caesar and that God had graciously granted safety to all on board. While God had promised safety, that did not render human action irrelevant. Paul urges the centurion and soldiers to keep everyone on board (v.31), showing that faith doesn't mean passivity. Instead, it leads to obedience.

Interestingly, God's deliverance doesn't come through a preserved ship, but through its destruction. The vessel runs aground and is shattered by waves, forcing passengers to swim and cling to pieces of debris (v.41-44). This is a vivid picture of how **God often brings us to safety not by preventing challenges, but by using it**. As the ship hit a reef, however, the Roman soldiers plan to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from escaping during the chaos of the shipwreck (v.42). This action reflects the harsh Roman military code, where guards could be executed if prisoners escaped under their watch (Acts 12:19). Their intent was not rooted in cruelty but in self-preservation—a fear of the consequences they would face if any prisoner fled. However, this plan is overruled by the centurion, who, “wanting to save Paul,” intervenes to stop them (v.43). His decision not only preserves Paul's life but also shows how Paul's godly influence had earned him respect and favor even from his captors. **Despite being a prisoner, Paul emerges as a spiritual leader and voice of wisdom during the crisis at sea**. In Acts 27:21-26, he speaks with authority, urging the men to take courage and assuring them of God's promise that no lives would be lost. **By the time we reach verses 39–44, Paul's leadership is unquestioned**. Though technically under Roman custody, **Paul commands attention not through force or position, but through spiritual insight and unwavering confidence in God**. His influence reflects the biblical principle that leadership in God's kingdom is rooted not in status but in service and faithfulness (Mark 10:43-45). Even in chains, Paul demonstrates a shepherd's heart—concerned for the well-being of everyone aboard, from the soldiers to the sailors and prisoners. Paul embodies the role of a shepherd in crisis—offering guidance, hope, and intercession. He may have been in chains, but his character and conduct reveal that he was the freest man on board, leading not with worldly power but with spiritual authority shaped by faith and dependence on God.

To Ponder:

1. Have you seen God use challenges in your life to accomplish His purpose? If yes, what did you learn from those moments?
2. How does Paul's influence on the ship challenge our understanding of what true leadership looks like, especially in difficult circumstances?

II. The Strength | Acts 28:1-6

Having just survived a violent shipwreck, Paul and the other 275 people find themselves washed ashore on the island of Malta. What follows is not a pause in God's mission but a continuation of it, even in unexpected circumstances. The people of Malta display a strikingly fickle disposition. They begin by showing "unusual kindness" (v.2) to the shipwrecked group, welcoming them with warmth and hospitality. Yet the moment Paul is bitten by a viper, their opinion shifts sharply—they conclude he must be a murderer receiving divine justice (v.4). However, when he suffers no harm, they swing to the opposite extreme, declaring him a god (v.6). **This dramatic shift reveals how quickly human opinion can change when it's not grounded in truth.** Their kindness was not rooted in genuine righteousness or spiritual understanding, but in shallow perception and superstition. This pattern is repeated throughout Scripture—people may appear kind and well-meaning, yet their hearts can still be far from God (Isaiah 29:13). The danger lies in mistaking temporary sentiment for enduring godliness. C.S. Lewis captures this problem in *The Problem of Pain*, where he describes those who are "lost in their own niceness"—people who behave outwardly well but are internally detached from God's truth. He writes that such people are "harder to save than the prostitute or the publican," because their self-perception blinds them to their need for grace. **This kind of "niceness" becomes a subtle form of evil when it masks pride, self-righteousness, or hypocrisy.** Judas Iscariot is a prime example: he feigned concern for the poor in John 12:5, criticizing Mary for using expensive perfume on Jesus, yet John notes that Judas was a thief who cared nothing for the poor but only himself. His outward "niceness" cloaked an inner betrayal. In the same way, the Maltese people's hospitality quickly morphed into superstition and misplaced worship. **When kindness is not tethered to truth and humility, it can easily become a tool of deception—even self-deception.**

The response of the Maltese people to Paul's snakebite also reveals the depth of their superstition (v.6). Initially convinced that Paul was a murderer facing divine retribution, they completely reverse their judgment when he remains unharmed, concluding instead that he must be a god. **This shift exposes the instability and danger of a worldview driven by mysticism and superstition rather than truth.** Their belief system was built on a cause-and-effect understanding of divine justice: good things happen to good people, and bad things to the wicked. But the Gospel of Jesus Christ overturns that thinking—Christ, the sinless One, suffered and died, while the guilty are offered grace. The Maltese did not yet know this truth, so their superstitious mindset led them from hasty condemnation to misguided exaltation. Their reaction is a warning against measuring spiritual realities through emotional or circumstantial experiences. **Superstition and mysticism remain real dangers for believers today. When we interpret life through omens, feelings, or signs apart from God's Word, we trade the sure foundation of Scripture for unstable speculation.** Mysticism often elevates personal experience above divine revelation, creating a faith built on sand (Matthew 7:26-27). Paul himself warned against such thinking, reminding the Colossians not to be taken captive by "philosophy and empty deceit" or by the "worship of angels" and visions (Colossians 2:8, 18). **When believers rely on dreams, impressions, or mystical interpretations without biblical grounding, they become vulnerable to deception. True faith is not mystical guesswork; it is a confident trust in the revealed character and promises of God.** As Paul's experience in Malta shows, supernatural events can open doors for witness—but they must always be interpreted in light of Gospel truth, not cultural superstition.

To Ponder

1. How can "niceness" become a spiritual danger when not grounded in truth, as seen in both the Maltese people and in Judas Iscariot's false concern for the poor?
2. What does the drastic shift in the Maltese people's opinion of Paul—from murderer to god—tell us about the dangers of forming beliefs based on circumstances or emotions rather than truth?
3. In what ways do superstition and mysticism still affect people's thinking today, even in the church, and how can we guard ourselves against them?