

"The Road to Rome"

Part 14

Acts 22-28

Introduction: Last week in our study we sailed through the storm in Acts 27 and watched as everyone on the ship survived the shipwreck. All 276 men safely reached the shore and all in different ways. Now we would think as we move on that the problems would all be behind Paul as he was making his way to Rome. But that is not the case. There is something else that will happen to Paul on the island which they landed on.

I. The Snake Bite

Notice Acts 28:1-2

The island they landed on was the island of Melita. Luke refers to the people on the island as Barbarous. This word means "those who speak a different language". These people treated Paul and all the others with great kindness. It was cold and rainy for the month was November and the natives of the island built a fire for Paul and the other men.

Application:

This is the hand of God providing what Paul and the others needed. How many times has our God provided for us and we do not stop to notice?

Philippians 4:19

¹⁹ But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Notice Acts 28:3

This is an interesting verse for we are told that Paul was gathering firewood. Now let us think about this for a moment. He is a prisoner and may have been in chains at that time. Maybe they were taken off because of needing to swim and then put

back on him. Either way he is a not just sitting back and letting others do the work he is helping in any way that he can.

Then out of the heat comes a very poisonous snake and bites Paul on the hand and will not let go. The snake being cold-blooded would have been unable to move until it was placed upon the heat. It was there long enough to get warm and mobile and when Paul put his hand close it struck him and refused to let go.

Notice Acts 28:4

When the natives saw the snake attached to Paul's hand, they believed him to be a murderer who somehow escaped the sea, but they believed he would never escape the snake bite. The word "vengeance" here is seen by many as "Justice" and believe that it refers to a goddess that these people worshipped. They believed that Paul was a murderer, and Justice would not permit him to live. They most likely knew he was a prisoner and now they believed him to be guilty of murder.

Notice Acts 28:5-6

When the snake attached itself, Paul simply held his hand over the fire and shook the snake off and into the fire. The natives were expecting Paul to fall over dead, that tells us just how deadly the snake was. They knew what kind of a snake it was, and they knew the quick killing power of the snake's venom. When Paul did not fall over as they expected they were amazed, and they changed their minds and believed him to be a god.

Now, you are wondering how this would apply to you and me and how this passage could be used in our lives.

Well let me say that Paul shook off more than one snake even though you did not see them all. Let me show you the other snakes he shook off and how this applies to you and me.

Let us start this application by looking at what Paul was doing when he was bitten.

Notice Acts 28:3

Paul was working. He was not just sitting back and letting others do the work. He was active and he was doing all he could to keep the fire burning. He was gathering wood to throw upon the fire.

Application:

Let me give you the picture I see here. Paul is a picture of what every believer should be doing in the church. We are to be doing all we can to keep the fires burning for Jesus Christ so that the church does not become cold and complacent. This is true in 2 ways.

First of all, we need to be sure to keep the fires burning within our own hearts. If we are not careful, we can become cold and complacent in our own personal walk with Jesus Christ. The way we keep the fire burning within our own hearts is to make sure we continue to feed the fire with the proper material. If you build a fire at home, you know that you must continue to throw wood on, or it will eventually go out. In order to keep the fire burning in our hearts we need 3 things.

1. **The Word of God as a steady diet.**
2. **Prayer**
3. **Fellowship/Church**

These 3 fuels will keep the fires within our hearts burning hot. But when we begin to neglect any of these, I can assure you that the fires will begin to go out. You and I will become cold and the next thing you know you will be on the wrong path. Second, we are to work together to keep the fires burning within the body of Christ. That means that we must help each other and when we see a brother or sister in the Lord falling away, we need to assist them in getting the fire rekindled again.

Galatians 6:1-2

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

² *Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*

So, Paul was kindling the fire when the snake bit him. This brings us to the first snake he shook off:

1. The Snake of Crisis

Paul is in the middle of kindling the fire when the snake attaches itself to him. He shakes it off and never stops working.

Application:

We need to understand that when we are busy fueling the fires within our hearts or helping another believer kindle their fire there are going to be times of crisis' and we must not allow that to stop us from continuing to serve the Lord. Paul was bitten with the snake but that never stopped him and when a crisis arises it should not stop us either.

There will always be times of crisis that arise and there will with them be the temptation to stay home or to quit. Don't let a time of crisis stop you from doing what God has called you to do. Remember that God was in control of Paul's life and God had allowed Paul to be on the island for a reason. Paul was there for 3 months and I believe that people were saved because Paul did not quit.

Notice Acts 28:10-11

Paul preached the Gospel for 3 months and when they left the natives provided all they needed. That sounds to me like Christian love.

1 John 3:18

¹⁸My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

So, Paul shook off the snake of crisis.

2. The Snake of Criticism

Notice Acts 28:4

When I read this verse I realize that these people accused Paul of being a murderer. They made a judgment based upon the snake bite thinking that since Paul was bitten he must be guilty of murder because this was the worst kind of snake so he must be guilty of the worst kind of crime. This was criticism at its worst. But Paul shook the snake of criticism off into the fire and continued to press forward for the 3 months he was there.

Application:

Let me just tell you from experience that when you serve God there are going to be people that say things and they will be definitely words of criticism. Let us not forget that Jesus was criticized many times in His public ministry.

Matthew 9:3

³And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth.

Matthew 9:34

³⁴But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils.

Jesus was accused of "blasphemy" and of "casting out demons by the power of Satan". That is criticism! Jesus disciples were often criticized for their preaching, but it did not stop them nor did it stop Jesus. Here in our text, it did not stop Paul. So there too will be times when you and I will be criticized for something but we cannot allow that to stop us from continuing to do what God has called us to do.

We must learn to allow words to roll off of our backs because if you are going to quit every time someone make a critical remark you will never get anything done for God. People will always have their opinions but let us no grow weary in well doing.

Galatians 6:9

⁹ And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

Let us learn to shake off the snakes of criticism.

3. The Snake of Cynicism

Notice Acts 28:6

The people around the fire that day stood there watching and expecting Paul to fall down dead. There is no evidence that they stepped in with a desire to help but instead they called him a murderer and then waited for him to fall over.

Application:

When I speak of the snake of cynicism I am referring to people that will always doubt us and will in no way step into help but instead, they will stand back and wait for you to fail. They will always have a negative attitude and say things like **"I knew that would never work"** or **"I told you he would fail"** or **"There is no way that that can be the will of God"**. All they will do is wait for those who are working to kindle the fire to somehow "fall" in their walk so they can glory in someone's failure. Usually these kind of people do very little but they are great at throwing stones at others.

Don't allow these people to stop you from serving the Lord. Let me tell you the best way to shake off the these snakes and that is to pray and know the will of God for when you are in the will of God you will have the confidence to shake off all snakes no matter what kind they are.

Conclusion: If you are involved for God, I can assure you that you are going to be snake bitten. We must be ready, and we must be quick to shake the snakes off. Let me explain why. If they are left to hang on, they will inject poison into you and it will not only cause you to quit but it will make you very bitter.