

# Immortal 'Til the Work is Done

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please, sorry, please return to your seats and we will continue to worship our God together with the meeting and teaching of God's Word.

We are in Acts chapter 27 going through to chapter 28 verse 16 this morning, so a slightly long section. We are actually near the end of the book, so please turn with me there and we will pray for the meeting and teaching of God's Word.

Heavenly Father, we come to your Word again with a posture of humble submission, with a eagerness to hear your voice.

We ask that you would address us where we are in our lives. Captivate us with the glorious vision of Christ so that that might undergird our lives through all its ups and downs.

Help us now in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Acts chapter 27 starting verse 1. And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustine cohort named Julius.

[ 1 : 50 ] And embarking in a ship of Adramatium, which was about to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica.

The next day we put in at Sidon, and Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go to his friends and be careful. And putting out to sea, from there we sailed under the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us.

And when we had sailed across the open sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra and Lysia. There the centurion found the ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy and put us on board.

We sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty off Snidus. And as the wind did not allow us to go further, we sailed under the lee of Crete off Salmoni, coasting along it with difficulty. We came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Myra. Since much time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous because even the fast was already over, Paul advised them, saying, Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.

[ 3 : 08 ] But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said. And because the harbor was not suitable to spend the winter in, the majority decided to put out to sea from there on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing both southwest and northwest and spend the winter there.

Now, when the south wind blew gently, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close to shore. But soon, a tempestuous wind, called the northeaster, struck down from the landing.

And when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along. Running under the lee of a small island called Kauda, we managed with difficulty to secure the ship's boat.

After hoisting it up, they used supports to undergird the ship. Then, fearing that they would run aground on Styrdus, they lowered the gear, and thus they weren't driven along. Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo.

And on the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.

[ 4 : 29 ] Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss.

Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, Do not be afraid, Paul.

You must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you. So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told.

But we must run aground on some island. When the 14th night had come as we were being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight, the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. So they took a sounding and found 20 fathoms.

A little further on, they took a sounding again and found 15 fathoms. And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come. And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship and had lowered the ship's boat into the sea under pretense of laying out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.

[ 5 : 49 ] Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it go. As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, Today is the 14th day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing.

Therefore I urge you to take some food, for it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you. And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all, he broke it and began to eat.

Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves. We were in all 276 persons in the ship. And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea.

Now when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach on which they planned, if possible, to run the ship ashore. So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the ropes and tied the rudders.

Then hoisting the four sails to the wind, they made for the beach. But striking a reef, they met the vessel on the ground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by the surf.

[ 6 : 58 ] The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away in the sea. But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan.

He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, and the rest on planks were on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land.

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.

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.

So he has escaped from the sea. Justice has not allowed him to live. 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.

[ 8 : 02 ] 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. Now, in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief men of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days.

It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dissonance. 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 weren't here.

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 on a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead.

Putting aid at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. And from there, we made a circuit and arrived at Regium. And after one day, a southwest sprang up, and on the second day, we came to Puteoli.

There we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome. And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and

three taverns to be missed.

[ 9 : 15 ] On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage. And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself with the soldier who guarded him. This is God's holy and authoritative word.

We've seen throughout this book, where this is the second to last sermon in this book, and throughout the book, we have seen how the apostles have been bearing witness to Jesus after they received the power of the Holy Spirit in chapter one, chapter two.

And here, in the first 12 chapters of the book, we follow Apostle Peter and his ministry. And for the rest of the chapters, we've been following Paul. And the narrative has been pretty rapid.

It's been proceeding pretty quickly. A lot of events happening. A lot of longer periods of time condensed into short narratives. But now here, toward the end, everything kind of slows down. It becomes very dramatic. We've got all kinds of nautical details. And it's building the tension and raising the question, is Paul actually going to get to Rome?

[ 10 : 21 ] God had told him he's going to go to Rome to bear witness to Jesus in Acts 23, 11. But will that actually happen? And so that's the question that Luke's answering here.

And he teaches us that through this story, God preserves us to do what he has called us to do. God always preserves us to do what he has called us to do.

And he preserves Paul through three mortal dangers. First, from the storms. Second, from the soldiers. And third, from the snake. And we'll talk about those in turn. The first danger that Paul faces is the storm.

When, after Paul's appeal to Caesar is approved by Governor Festus, it says that they decide to sail for Italy in verse 1 of chapter 27. And he is entrusted to a centurion named Julius.

And here, it says, Luke starts to use the first person plural pronoun, we, again, indicating that Luke has rejoined Paul on his journey. Luke is now his companion.

[ 11 : 23 ] And it seems that Luke was granted permission to accompany Paul, which makes sense in light of verse 3, that Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him leave in Sidon to go to his friends and be cared for.

It was not uncommon for prisoners to be accompanied by their friends. Sometimes they would be granted permission for that because unlike in our country where prisoners are taken care of by the government, by their own expenses, people back then, prisoners have to be taken care of by their friends.

Paul is also joined by some other prisoners. Since only Roman citizens on trial could appeal to the emperor and go to Rome for trial, it's highly likely that the rest of the prisoners are convicted criminals on death row who are being transported to Rome to be killed in the gladiatorial games, which were at its peak popularity during this time.

So verse 2 also mentions that Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, accompanied Paul and Luke on the journey. Aristarchus, we know, was Paul's co-worker.

You know, he's mentioned in Philemon 24 and Colossians 4.10 as a fellow prisoner of Paul. So it's possible that he was also in prison with Paul here in this case. And as they start sailing from Caesarea to Rome, their journey is anything but smooth sailing.

[ 12 : 46 ] They can't catch a break. Verse 4, they're putting out to sea from Sidon and they're going under the lee of Cyprus, meaning they're sailing in the sheltered part away from the wind.

But the winds were against them. Verses 7 to 8, they sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty of snitus. The wind did not allow them to go any further.

They're making little progress over a long period of time. And Paul, being an experienced traveler with a lot of sailing mileage under his belt, offers a suggestion to the centurion and the people in charge of the ship.

A warning, really. He says in verses 9 to 10, Since much time had passed and the voyage was not dangerous because even the fast was already over, Paul advised them, saying, Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives. Some context is helpful here. The fast that Paul is referring to is the fast connected to the Day of Atonement. And according to our dating, based on the succession of Felix Mephistus we saw in the previous chapters, Paul would have been making this journey to Rome in 59 AD.

[ 13 : 59 ] The Day of Atonement in 59 AD fell on October 5th. And that detail is significant because ancient Jews in this area regarded sailing as unsafe from the Feast of Booths, which took place five

days after the Day of Atonement, and until through the spring.

So all of winter they considered sailing to be forbidden and unsafe during this time. Vegetius, a Roman writer who wrote about military warfare in 4th century AD, noted that navigation on the Mediterranean was safe until September 14, uncertain until November 11, and closed from November 11 until March 10.

So during the fall and the winter, the Mediterranean Sea was a treacherous place to sail because of the storms and the fog and the darkened skies.

You couldn't use the sun and the stars to navigate because you can't see any of it. It was a very dangerous time. Paul knows this, and so he warns them. And Luke doesn't tell us that Paul's prophesying here.

He's not speaking with divine authority here. He's just making a common sense judgment. Look around, what's happening? You know, all that cargo that's valuable to you, that's for your profit, you're going to lose that.

[15:14] In fact, not only the cargo, I think we might lose our very lives if we venture out at this time. And unfortunately, in this instance, Paul didn't have enough influence with the captain.

He says in verses 11 to 12, but the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said. And because the harbor was not suitable to spend the winter in, the majority decided to put out to sea from there on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of crux.

This was an unwise decision. And when they sailed out, they were struck immediately by a contestuous wind called a Northeaster. I almost preached this.

I was scheduled to preach this sermon two weeks ago. That would be very timely. We were struck by a Northeaster ourselves. Can you imagine sailing in the sea during those kinds of conditions? The ship, he says, was caught and could not face the wind. You're supposed to face the wind when there's strong wind, when you're sailing, so that the ship is more stable, not tossed to and fro.

[16:26] But they couldn't get the ship to do it because the wind was so strong. And so they just kind of gave up and gave way to the wind, and they're just being tossed wherever the wind blows, wherever the waves go.

And they take some emergency measures at this time. They first secure the ship's lifeboat because it was usually hanging out by the side of the ship.

But they realized that the lifeboat's going to be destroyed if they leave it there, so they hoist it up on board. That's the first thing they do. Second thing is that, but that was managed with difficulty.

Second thing they do is they support, they undergird the ship.

They put rope through the belly of the ship, and in order to support it, reinforce it, because as the waves continue to crash against it, the planks can come loose, it can start to break, water can come in, so they reinforce the belly.

And the third thing they do, he says, verse 17, Fearing that they would run aground on the surdus, they lowered the gear, and thus they were driven along. Surdus was notorious in the ancient world for being treacherous for sailors because of the shallow waters and quicksands that lurked all over the place there.

[17:35] And so they were obsessed with that fear, with fearing it, and so they didn't want to run aground on the surdus, so they lowered the gear. If you're using the ESV, there's a footnote after the word gear telling you that it's referring to the sea anchor.

A sea anchor, also known as a drift anchor. I had to do a lot of nautical research because I didn't know any of this stuff before this week. It's the drift anchor. It's not the conventional anchor that you drop to the bottom of the sea, to the sea bed, to keep it from moving.

Sea anchor is something that you just kind of let float behind the ship to create drag and slow down the ship when the winds are really heavy so that you don't go too fast and run into blocks or whatnot.

And so that's what's going on here. And it says in verses 18 to 19, they take up yet another measure. Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo. And on the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands.

The ship is so violently tossed by the waves, they're starting to throw things overboard to make the ship lighter and more stable. They get rid of the cargo, which they were hoping to profit from.

[ 18 : 44 ] And then they also get rid of the tackle, which is the rigging that you use to load and unload the cargo. I mean, you're getting rid of the cargo, you don't need the tackle anymore.

So they're lighting the ship. And then it says in verse 20, when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last.

They had taken all the emergency measures. They haven't seen the sun nor the stars for days. They have no idea where they are.

And so they have abandoned hope of survival altogether. Imagine yourself in your shoes for a moment. All your clothes are damp.

You're cold. You're shivering. You have literally no idea where you are. It's dark. And the ship can be wrecked at any given moment. So you're living with constant stress and suspense.

[ 19 : 43 ] What can happen? The next moment you might not be alive. Imagine living with that kind of mindset for days on end. And imagine if you could sleep. You can't sleep. You probably can't eat. You find out later they haven't been eating for days.

They're hungry. In fact, if you're moved around like that, you're probably also getting seasick. So people are throwing up. Imagine to see this is a terrible time. Shivering, sick, sleep-deprived, stressed, scared to death.

And they have no idea when it's going to end. You can continue on for months for all they know. It's so bad that they have at last abandoned all hope of being saved.

A few optimistic men maybe held up hope until the end. But now no one is hoping for survival.

Maybe at this point even Paul started to have doubt creep into him.

I thought the Lord had commanded me to bear witness to him in Rome. But then why does it seem like nature, which God controls, seems to be opposing my trip? Maybe this is how I'm going to die after.

[ 20 : 45 ] But God speaks to Paul to reassure him in verses 21 and 26. Please follow up with me there. Since they had been without food for a time, Paul stood up among them and said, Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete any curving injury and loss.

Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship.

And he said, Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you. So take heart, man, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told.

But we must run aground on some island. The phrase, you must stand before Caesar, is literally, it is necessary for you to stand before Caesar. It's the phrase that biblical writers in the New Testament often use to refer to God's ordained will.

God has ordained that you will stand before Caesar, and therefore it can't happen otherwise. It's guaranteed to happen.

[ 21 : 55 ] And lest this pagan audience of Paul think that he's referring to Castor and Pollux, Castor and Pollux were the twin gods that Romans regarded as the patron gods of sailors.

And later we find out in chapter 28, verse 11, that a ship that they ride on, the Alexandrian ship, had these twin gods as its figurehead on the ship.

So you know that people worship this God and rely on this God. But Paul states it emphatically. No, it's not those gods that are guaranteeing our safe passage.

He says, the God to whom I belong, and whom I worship, the one God, He is the one who is guaranteeing our safe passage.

And he's so confident in the Lord, he says, I have faith in God that will be exactly as I have been told. The storms, the seas are some of the most unpredictable and uncontrollable things in the world.

[ 22 : 56 ] To this day. And yet, even those things cannot thwart God's plan for Paul. Because God preserves us to do what He has called us to do.

This truth is a source of great comfort for us when things are not going as you planned. Remember that it's always going as God has planned. When you feel out of control in your life, remember that God is still in control.

Maybe the company you work for is going through turbulent times because your boss is not listening to you. Maybe due to the storms and shifting seas of the culture, you are having a hard time finding a job.

Maybe because of a disorganized or unhelpful advisor, you don't know if you will ever graduate or finish your degree. Maybe you feel like you have had to give up on your dreams because of your spouse or children.

And you're wondering if you made a terrible mistake. Maybe you feel like nothing is going your way, your life is spiraling out of control. But no matter what's going on, remember that God's sovereign purposes for you will prevail.

[ 24 : 11 ] The centurion and the pilot who did not listen to Paul when they should have could not prevent God's will for Paul from happening.

The storms that put their life in jeopardy could not prevent Paul from doing what God called him to do. Likewise, no storm can thwart God's plan for you.

The 19th century Scottish explorer and missionary David Livingstone, who gave his wife to preach the gospel among Africans, once said this, quote, I am immortal till my work is accomplished.

Livingstone is expressing the same truth in a different way. God preserves us to do what he has called us to do. On the 14th night of being tossed by the storm, the crew find themselves on the Adriatic Sea, which is the northernmost arm of the Mediterranean Sea, separating Italy from modern-day Vulcan countries like Albania and Montenegro.

And perhaps the sailors notice some of the waves break to know the rocks. They suspect that they're nearing wind. And so he says in verse 28, they took a sounding and found 20 fathoms.

[ 25 : 23 ] A little further on, they took a sounding again and found 15 fathoms. A fathom is a unit that the ancient people use for measuring the depths of the sea. And it's about the length of your arm span. Mine is not quite there, but it's about six feet.

And they used that. And so they could tell by measuring the sea depth that they're rapidly approaching land. And so lest they run aground on the rocks, they let down four anchors immediately to keep the ship from moving any further.

And then they wait and pray for daylight to come to make this actual sea. But while they're waiting, another threat emerges. Because some selfish sailors try to abandon ship and sneak away.

They pretend like they're hoping to lay down anchors, and they lower the lifeboat as they do it, planning to get away, leaving the rest stranded on the ship.

And they clearly don't believe Paul's prophecy. And out of desperation, they're trying to save their skin at the expense of the lives of others. And Paul quickly figures out what's happening.

[ 26 : 26 ] This is a sharp guy. And he says to the centurion and the soldiers, in verse 31, unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved. This is because their lives are bound up with Paul's.

God had earlier granted Paul all those who sailed with him. So it seems like Paul understood that conditionally. Their lives were being spared only because Paul was with them, and God had this mission for Paul, and he can't perish until he bears witness to Jesus in Rome.

And so if everyone doesn't stay on the ship, their survival will no longer be guaranteed. After Paul says this, the soldiers panic, and they cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it go, which, in retrospect, may not have been the smartest thing to do, but they're trying to stop them from getting away and getting rid of the temptation altogether.

It says in verses 33 to 38, as Don was approaching, Paul reassures the crew again, and encourages them to take some food and says, for it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you.

They haven't been eating because they've been engaged in this life or death struggle with the waves and the wind. And they say, and Paul says to them, for it will give you strength.

[ 27 : 40 ] Literally, it will be for your deliverance. Not a hair is to perish from your head is hyperbolic, but it does mean that their survival is guaranteed.

They will escape this ordeal, unscathed. That in a language reminiscent of the Lord's Supper, it's not the Lord's Supper, but it's reminiscent of it, it says in verse 35 that Paul sets an example for them all, taking bread, giving thanks to God in the presence of all, and he broke it and began to eat it.

Perhaps Paul shared it with his fellow believers, Luke and Aristarchus, on board. It must have been an amazing scene. All the sailors just, just, their hair all over the place, just scared to death, and they're shaking up, and then here's Paul.

Hey, let's break bread together. Trust in God, let's live. And he says that in verse 37, there were 276 persons on the ship.

That's a lot of people. And Paul's bearing witness to Jesus, even in that context. That includes the pilot and the crew, the owner of the ship and his servants, the centurion and his prisoners.

[ 28 : 54 ] And unfortunately, however, Paul's still not catching a break here. Their hope of sailing ashore on the beach is dashed when in verse 41 they strike a reef.

The bow, which is the front of the ship as you're going, gets stuck and becomes immovable, and the stern, the back of the ship, is being repeatedly battered by the waves so that bit by bit the ship is falling apart.

And it says in verse 42, now the soldier's plan was to kill the prisoners, which includes Paul, lest any should swim away in his skin. So here's another threat, another mortal threat.

Despite having made it this far, Paul is about to be killed by the soldiers, and this is understandable because under Roman law, the soldiers here were, soldiers were guarding prisoners most likely under capital punishment, capital sentences.

And under Roman law, if a guard let a prisoner escape, he was punished with the same punishment that the prisoner was supposed to get. So these soldiers don't want to die because if there's no ship, everybody's going to have to dash for the land and swim along, and then there's no way they're going to be able to keep track of everybody and keep them in place.

[ 30 : 10 ] So again, this reveals the sinful selfishness of the human heart over and over again. Right from the beginning, there are people who are thinking only of their own interests.

The pilot and the owner of the ship insisting on setting sail despite the risk for the sake of their own profit. The sailors were trying to sneak away on the lifeboat, who was trying to save only themselves.

And here the soldier is trying to save their skin, even after they have dramatically survived the storm. The only person who is thinking of other people's interests in this story is Paul.

And the centurion, Julius, whom God has disposed to be favorable toward Paul. Paul is a model for us as Christians of how we should behave in this dog-eat-dog world.

When others are only concerned with saving themselves, advancing their own careers, we should be concerned with saving others, helping others, encouraging others.

[ 31 : 10 ] When others are despairing of hope, we should demonstrate steadfast faith in God and have abiding hope. We can live selflessly in a selfish world.

We can live graciously in a cruel world because of our trust ultimately in God. None of the selfish, sinful people in the world can thwart God's will for our lives because God preserves us to do what he has called us to do.

And while the soldiers are applying to kill the prisoners, the centurion, who likes Paul, I mean, who wouldn't at this point, he's the only one that's sensible and helpful in this scenario and intervenes to save Paul.

And he orders people to, who knows how to swing to jump aboard, swing to shore, and then the rest of them use pieces of the ship and the planks as flotation devices to reach the shore. And this is in verse 44.

So it was that all were brought safely to land, just as God had promised and Paul had prophesied. God's promises and fulfilled, his real freedoms. And after they had swam ashore, they learned that the island was called Malta.

[ 32 : 23 ] This island is still called Malta to this day. There is a bay on that island that's happily called St. Paul's Bay. And Luke recounts in verse 2, the dated people showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all because it had begun to rain and was cold.

The word translated native here is the Greek word for foreigner, which is barbarous. It's where we get the English word barbarian. And the word is automatopeic.

It sounds like what it means. In a similar way that people nowadays, you know, dismissively characterize foreign language or irrelevant speech as kind of blah, blah, blah. Greeks, not foreigners, sounded like bar, bar, bar.

So they call them barbarians. And it's not necessarily a derogatory term. It's the only term that used to refer to foreigners. They could be used in a derogatory way. I don't think Luke is using it in a derogatory way here.

And I'm, it's, so there are foreigners that speak a foreign language. And I'm getting into a little bit of speculation here because Luke doesn't tell us explicitly that this is the case, but it's possible that this is the reason why we don't see Paul proclaiming the gospel here in Malta.

[ 33 : 41 ] Everywhere in Acts, the miraculous healings are accompanied by the proclamation of the name of Jesus. And this would have been a very appropriate place to note that Paul preached the gospel even to the barbarians because Paul explicitly says in Romans 1, 14 that that's his calling to preach the gospel not only to the Greeks but also to the barbarians.

But Luke doesn't include any such details. In fact, later in verses 7 to 10, Luke tells us that Paul healed a whole bunch of people of diseases in Malta. And usually after that, there's proclamation of the gospel.

And, but here, there's no preaching, no mention of preaching of the gospel. It's possible, I can't be sure, but it's possible that Paul just didn't speak their language. Which would highlight the importance of learning the native language for every Christian missionary.

It's also possible that Paul did preach the gospel and we're supposed to assume that. Luke didn't record it because he's trying to emphasize something else here. Namely how God was sovereignly bringing Paul to Rome and how his companions and himself were honored by the natives and provided for by the natives because of the healing.

So, now at this point, sorry, it's been going fast. I'm going fast this morning, but we might sigh, breathe a sigh of relief. Okay, finally, they're on land.

[ 35 : 04 ] All the drama is over, but not so fast. It says in verse 3, 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.

Here, again, Paul's just trying to be helpful to his neighbors. He gathers bundles of sticks and puts it on the fire and then there happened to be a snake among the bundles of fire and then, of course, he doesn't want to get burned in the fire, so he jumps out and then it fastens up onto Paul's hand and bites him.

And some of you in that situation would say, well, that's my luck. I survived the storm and the shipwreck only to be bit by a poisonous snake.

He says in verses 4 to 6, 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, 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 wasn't God.

[ 36 : 14 ] Apparently, the native people who lived there, and they would be the people who know best, think that the viper that bit Paul was a venomous snake. And they expect him to swell up or just suddenly fall and die.

Even to this day, around 95% of people who are bitten by a black mamba dies due to the lack of timely anti-venom treatment. A snake bite can kill as quickly as 10 minutes, but usually it takes around 30 to 60 minutes to kill.

And so, they wait for him to die, and then he doesn't die, and then they realize, okay, what is going on? Our interpretation situation was wrong, so he must be a god.

Ancient people in this part of the world believe in the Greek goddess justice. That's why the word justice is capitalized. They thought that she pursued guilty people and punished them, but Paul suffers no harm and simply shakes his neck off.

Paul was not God, but he was protected by God. In your day-to-day life, do you really live as though your almighty God, your loving heavenly Father, is watching over you?

[ 37 : 26 ] It's not the twin gods that I mentioned earlier, Castor and Pollux, that govern and guide your life. It's not DK, the goddess of justice, that governs and guides your life.

It's not fate or karma that governs and guides your life. Whatever it is that you might think of as governing your life, as guiding your life, it's not those things.

It's the Lord God who governs and guides your life. And for Luke's audience, this episode would immediately bring to mind Jesus' words earlier from Luke 10, 19-20.

Remember, the Acts is a sequel to the Gospel of Luke. Jesus says to the 72 disciples he sends out to proclaim the kingdom of God, Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy and nothing shall hurt you.

Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven. This doesn't mean that we should go out looking for serpents and scorpions to step on.

[ 38 : 37 ] Paul doesn't do that. Serpents and scorpions, as the immediate context of Luke 10 teaches us, symbolize the power of the enemy, namely Satan, the ancient serpent.

we should not, and Jesus tells us that we should not be fascinated primarily by our power over the evil spirits. Jesus says, do not rejoice in the fact that you have authority to tread scorpions and serpents and over the power of the enemy.

Don't rejoice in that, Jesus. Rejoice instead that your names are written in heaven. That is the greater privilege. Don't be impressed with yourself.

Don't be impressed by what you can do, but be impressed by what Christ has done. Don't be enthralled by power and authority.

No, be enthralled instead by grace and mercy of God. Because the former leads to pride, but the latter leads to humility.

[ 39 : 48 ] Remember also that God doesn't promise that Christians will never suffer harm or never die. Recall that earlier in the book of Acts. We've already seen Stephen and James killed for their faith.

But because God had promised Paul that he will bear witness to Jesus in Rome, no harm can come to him until that specific promise is fulfilled. He is immortal until his work is done.

God preserves us to do what he has called us to do. And the talk of serpents and justice have further profound application for us.

Remember what Paul admitted to in Acts 22, 19 to 20, namely that he imprisoned Christians and he was guilty of the blood of Stephen the martyr because he was standing there approving his lynching.

So in other words, the natives of Malta are right. Paul is a murderer. He persecuted the church.

[ 40 : 53 ] He killed. He's responsible for the death of many Christians. Paul did deserve to die. And yet, here he is beyond the reach of condemnation and death.

Why? Because justice has been satisfied by our Lord and Savior, Jesus. How have we been liberated from the power of the enemy, from the power of the serpent?

We were all guilty sinners deserving of death and eternal damnation. And for that reason, we have every reason to expect evil to befall us in life. of course, bad things will happen to us because I don't deserve any better.

That's what I deserve. But if we think that way, we're forgetting that Jesus paid for our sins on the cross. Colossians 2, 13-15 tells us, God forgave us all our trespasses by canceling the debt, the record of debt that stood against us with this legal demand.

This he set aside by nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in Christ. On the cross, Jesus freed us from slavery to sin and Satan.

[ 42 : 09 ] On the cross, God's sin for all, God's eternal love toward us is displayed. On the cross, our salvation is secured. Let me ask you, are you one of those people who always lives waiting for the other shoe to drop?

You're always expecting something to go wrong. You're living life in suspense, expecting something to end poorly. If so, have you considered the cross?

Are you remembering that Jesus already paid for your sins? when we who are evil know how to give good gifts to our children, we don't give them snakes and scorpions when they ask for bread and egg.

Will not our heavenly Father who loves us perfectly, will he give us anything but what is good? God's love for us for us.

That's why Romans 8:28 is true. We know that for those who love God, all things work together for good.

[ 43 : 21 ] For those who are called according to his purpose, because God's sovereign purpose is for us, will stand. God's sovereign grace for us will prevail.

prevail. So let's live with confidence and faith in Jesus. Let's pray. Lord, there are many things in this life we can't control.

Many things that happen that are not pleasant, that we might call bad. But ultimately, for us, your people who love you, you promise to work all things out for good, for your glory, for our good to make us more like Jesus, to save us.

So Lord, help us to live with unwavering faith in that reality. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.