

GOD'S WORK IN MALTA AND BIBLE STUDY IN ROME

Acts 28:1-31

Key Verse: 28:30, 31

“For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!”

In the last passage, Paul warned the people not to sail but they did not listen to him. When the ship was caught in the perfect storm, God raised Paul to be a shepherd who planted faith in God and his promise in the hearts of the people. Even though he was a prisoner who was in the storm too, he prayed and saved people by planting hope in the hearts of the people. May God help us to be a shepherd in all circumstances through prayer and faith in God's promise. Amen.

Today's passage teaches us how God blessed Paul to be a blessing to the people in Malta even through a viper bite. Finally, Paul arrived in Rome, but he had to live as a prisoner in a rented house. With God's vision; however, Paul preached the kingdom of God and Jesus Christ for two year. May God grant us one word of God through this passage. Amen.

I. God's Work in Malta (John 9:-3)

As Paul prophesied, everyone safely arrived on shore. It was an island called Malta. To the islanders, 279 people were strangers whom they could consider enemies. In the movie, “End of the Spear,” the natives killed men missionaries because they were strangers and felt dangerous. What was the response of the people in Malta? Look at verse 2, **“The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold.”** Truly the God of Paul promised and was fulfilling his promise that none of them would die. How happy they were when they were welcomed by the native people with fire and food. Paul did not pretend he was somebody but gathered a pile of brushwood for everyone. As he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. Ouch. When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, **“This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, the goddess Justice has not allowed him to live.”** This is what people usually think when they see others' unfortunate event in life; Karma, cause and effect, crime and punishment. Just as the disciples saw the born blind man and asked Jesus, “Who sinned? This man or his parents?” What about you, how do you see of other's and your own unfortunate event in life? Maybe some cases it may be right; the person has brought the consequences of his or her sins. But Christians must learn to see in God's perspective and act.

What was Paul's response? But Paul was cool. He just shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. He should have freaked out and called doctors or asked people to save him. But Paul had faith in God and the promise Jesus gave to his disciples in **Mark 16:17-18**, which says, **“And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.”** Paul just came through a huge storm. God not only save him but also used him to save 278 people. In addition, God promised that Paul would go to Rome. So the little viper was nothing to him. A viper cannot stop God's plan. So Paul could shake the viper off as if he was bitten by a mosquito.

But people could not understand how Paul could be so calm like that. A viper is known as the most venomous snake. When a person is bitten by a viper, he or she will bleed, swell, and/or lose conscience and eventually die within a few minutes to a few hours. So **the people expected Paul to swell up or suddenly fall dead, because they knew that everyone who were bitten died.** They waited for 5 minutes, 30 minutes, ten hours but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they were puzzled and changed their minds and said he was a god. People without faith in God go up and down many times in a day. It is because they only believe what they see and act according to circumstances.

Then why did God let this happened to Paul? It was not because of Paul's sins but to reveal the glory of God just as Jesus said to the disciples, “This happened so that the glory of God may be revealed.” Therefore, we must learn to see the fortunate events in life with God's perspective. **Romans 8:28**, says, **“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”** Yesterday, I attended the first memorial service of late Dr. Samuel Lee. His sons shared his testimony about his father who told him about his life. In human point of view his life was a life of tragedy. While growing up, he was not loved by his parents. His mother passed away when he was a baby, and his step mother made him to work in a factory instead of sending him to a high school and used his money to educate her children. When he was study at night after work, his step mother came in and kicked one of his eyes because he was burning lamp oil for nothing. Due to this event, his eye was bleed and almost lost eyesight. He could not forgive his stepmother for a while even after meeting Jesus. When he thought about his life, he was sorrowful. But when he study the Bible deeply, he realized that God had prepared him for God's good work; to understand and love people who grew up without love. Thus, God could use him to became a father for many fatherless, and a mother to motherless people. May God bless each one of us to see unfortunate

events in life in God and find his sovereign plan. Amen.

Now, people began to see Paul in different eyes; someone special. Publius, the chief official of the island welcomed Paul, Luke and Aristarchus, to his home and showed us generous hospitality for three days. Probably Paul wanted to do something for Publius and realized that his father was sick due to fever and severe diarrhea. He went to see him and after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. Through Publius' hospitality, the whole people in the island were blessed by God. According to historians, many people in Malta accepted Jesus as their savior. They honored Paul and his companions in many ways; and when three were ready to sail, they furnished them with the supplies they needed.

Our God is amazing in fulfilling his promise. Using the viper's bite, God opened the hearts of the people to Paul who healed and preached the gospel to them. God blessed the people through Paul and the people blessed Paul by providing all the necessary things for Paul's journey to Rome. Thus, they become a blessing to each other. Let us trust in God who blesses people to be a blessing to others. Amen.

II. Paul's Life of Mission in Rome (11-31)

After staying for three month in the island, they sailed in an Alexandrian ship heading toward Italy. They arrived Puteoli via Syracuse and Rhegium. In Puteoli, some brothers and sisters invited them and spend a week with them. Moreover, other brothers and sisters heard that they were coming to Rome, they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet them. Before Paul came to Rome, God's work was going on in many brothers and sisters. They loved God and his servant Paul. What was Paul's response? At the sight of these people Paul thanked God and was encouraged.

God was comforting Paul and his companions through other brothers and sisters. In many towns he preached the gospel, he was not welcomed but persecuted by others. He might have expected the same trials and persecutions also in Italy, but it was different. Many brothers and sisters traveled long distance in order to welcome him. What an encouragement.

Paul also gave thanks to God even though he was a prisoner. He could give thanks to God for the work of God already in Italy. He also could give thanks to God for his protection and provision. God protected from all the harms; deadly stoning, beaten by mobsters, almost torn to pieces by religious leaders, the plan of forty life dedicated assassins, and the storms and vipers. God provided best body guards, free transportations, food, and even his power to heal people and preach the gospel. Paul knew that God had led him to Rome for His purpose. And the

brothers and sisters in the region came to see him. When he counted God's blessings in his life of mission, he could not but give thanks to God. Let us also give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for each one of us in Christ Jesus. Amen.

What was the life of Paul in Rome? **Look at verse 16, "When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him."** What kind of prisoner could live by himself in a house? God again provided him everything; a place to teach the word of God with the best body guard.

Three days later he called together the local Jewish leaders and explained how he came to Rome as a prisoner. Look at verses 17b-20, "When they had assembled, he said to them: 'My brothers, although I have done **nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors**, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans.¹⁸ They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death.¹⁹ The Jews objected, so **I was compelled to make an appeal to Caesar**. I certainly **did not intend to bring any charge against my own people**.²⁰ **For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.**" Again, Paul said that he was because of the hope of Israel that he became a prisoner. **The hope of Israel is the Messiah who will come to save the people of Israel. The Messiah is Jesus Christ.**

What was the response of the Jews in Rome. Look at verses 21-22, "**They replied, 'We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of our people who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you.**²² **But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect.**" Unexpectedly, the religious leaders in Jerusalem did not send anything about Paul to the Jews in Rome, even though they knew that Paul was going to Rome. Moreover, the Jew in Rome had open heart though others talked against the Christianity. The Jews in Rome was more reasonable than Jews in Jerusalem, who formed mobs without evidence. Maybe they were influenced by Roman culture more than Jewish culture in Jerusalem due to distance.

So they arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. He witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus. Since they were Jews, Paul studied the Old Testament with them in order to prove that Jesus is the Promised Messiah. The Jews believed that God would send the Messiah to save them from their enemies and raise the glorious kingdom of David once again. Their concept of Messiah is earthly one. But the Old Testament

teaches that the Messiah would suffer and die to save people from their sins and bring them back to the eternal kingdom of God. As always, some believed and others would not believe. Those who are waiting for the earthly messianic kingdom will never believe that Jesus is the Promised Messiah.

So Paul had made this final statement, saying, **“The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet: ²⁶“Go to this people and say, “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.” ²⁷ For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’ Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!”** This was the message of repentance for the Jews who did not accept Jesus even though the Old Testament proved it. Due to their rejection, God has been sending his messengers to the Gentiles, including himself. Paul understood that in this way, God was also raising jealousy in the hearts of the Jews, and thus they also come back to God and obey his calling to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

What was Paul’s response to the rejection of the Jews? **Look at verse 30, “For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him.”** Even though the Jews did not accept the gospel, he was not discouraged but continued to teach, welcoming all who came to see him. Paul received God’s vision to go to Rome when he was in Ephesus, where great work of God was done through discipleship ministry. Through the twelve disciples, the whole province of Asia heard the gospel of Jesus. Rome was the world power nation where the gospel could go out to the whole world. When he received the vision to go to Rome, he could have thought that there should be greater work in Rome than Ephesus. But Paul was living in a rented house, teaching the Bible to people who came to see him, and there was no great work of God going on in Rome. But he knew that one person who came to study the word of God was important to God. One person could grow to be a disciple who could go out to preach the gospel to the whole world. Paul accepted God’s plan to raise disciples in a rented house. In stead of being discouraged, he devoted himself to teach the Bible for two years with God’s vision, evangelizing the whole world through Roman roads.

What did Paul teach in Rome? Look at verse 31, **“He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!”** The content of his message was the kingdom of God and Jesus Christ. It is interesting that the content of his message to the Gentiles was not much different from the message to the Jews. Why? It is because

the gospel message applies to everyone, the Jews and the Gentiles alike. Human fundamental problem is sin problem. People are miserable not because of circumstances but because of sins. Jesus came to save us from our sins on the cross so that we are forgiven through faith in him and live a life with God's love and forgiveness. Praise God for Jesus Christ, our savior.

Not only so, Jesus rose from the dead in order to free us from the power of death and bring us back to the kingdom of God. A false hope is not only the fundamental problem of the Jews but also of all peoples of all nations. When people's hope is on earth, they only look at their earthly possessions and status. When people live with earthly hope, they live under the power of death, which is the power of Satan in fact. Where there is God, there is the kingdom of God. When we have Jesus as our Lord and king, we live in the kingdom of God even on earth. Thank God for Jesus, our Lord and savior.

Through this passage, God encouraged me to plant the gospel of Jesus with the hope of God. God had given me his vision that 1,200 Bible teachers would come out of DuPage ministry. Though we do not see many disciples right now, each one here is very important to God. It is because God can use each of us to be disciples who can go out to preach the gospel to the whole world. Amen. May God help me continue to devote myself raising 12 disciples of Jesus in DuPage.

Through today's passage we learned that God works for good of those who love him and called according his purpose even through an unfortunate event in life. May God bless each one of us to see life events in God's good purpose. In Rome, Paul taught the gospel to the people in a rented house with the hope of God. Though Paul did not see with his own eyes, God changed Rome. By AD 380, God raised her to be a Christian country and spread the gospel to the whole world through her. May God bless each one of us to be used by God raising DuPage to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, a missionary sending county. Amen.