

In Step with Jesus 157

June 15, 2025

Key Text: And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This [He] said, signifying what death [he] should die. (John 12: 32-33)

Last week we finished reading Acts chapter 27. There was so much we could learn from that chapter but one of the lessons that stood out for me was that Paul's presence on the ship was the guarantee of safety for all the people on that ship. As directed by the Holy Spirit, he gave wise counsels regarding the journey, and he prophesied about the shipwreck they were to experience. Most importantly, he was the bearer of the good news of God's promise to save their lives and provided encouragement to his despondent fellow travelers. Although the sailors and the soldiers did not believe Paul completely, as they revealed by their actions, Paul remained hopeful because He knew the faithfulness of God and trusted Him to deliver on His promises. However, Paul remained alert and focused. He was sensitive enough to discern the sailors' intention to abandon the ship and informed the centurion who intervened to prevent the disaster.

Another blessing of Paul's presence on that ship was that the soldiers spared the lives of the other prisoners because of Paul. When the shipwreck happened, the soldiers wanted to kill all the prisoners because they suspected that they would use that opportunity to escape. Paul was one of the prisoners and to kill all the prisoners was to kill Paul also. But because Paul had found favor in the sight of Julius, the centurion, Julius prevented the soldiers from going ahead with their plans, just because he wanted to save Paul. Julius was a man of authority in that ship. The soldiers respected him. If Julius was just an ordinary soldier, they may not have listened to him to spare the prisoners' lives. Here is another lesson for us. As people of God, we need to persistently pray that God would grant us favor in the sight of people of authority. Such favors are not just for our own benefit but also for the benefit of the people around us.

Today we will start reading the last chapter of Acts, which is Acts chapter 28. Paul and his fellow companions had survived the predicted shipwreck and escaped to an Island called Malta. The first ten verses of Acts 28 records Paul's experiences in Malta. Let us read those ten verses and see what the Lord will teach us.

Acts 28: 1- 10

After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta. ²The native people showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold. ³When 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. ⁴When 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.”⁵ He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm.⁶ 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 was a god.

⁷ Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days.⁸ It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him, healed him.⁹ And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured.¹⁰ They also honored us greatly, and when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed.

Reflections

God, again, stationed the people of Malta to show unusual kindness to Paul and his fellow travelers. They welcomed them and lit a fire for them to keep warm. We may not always understand why God allows us to have some difficulties as we journey through life. But even in those difficulties, if we look closely enough, we shall find evidence of God’s uncommon favor all along the way, even in very unusual places like a strange island.

While Paul and his companions sat by the fireplace, everything was going well until a misfortune befell nobody else but Paul. A venomous snake, a viper, bit him as he gathered wood for the fire. The people of Malta had no other interpretation for Paul’s ‘misfortune’ except to conclude that he must be a murderer. There was no other explanation for such bad luck as surviving a shipwreck, only to suffer a snakebite. But even in that situation, God was in control. Paul did not die, to the amazement of all the people. Instead of harm, the snake bite highlighted Paul and enabled his ministry in Malta.

Could it be that God allows problems in our lives to get people to pay attention to us and observe us, so that they will see Him glorify Himself in us? Our reading tells us that the people of Malta watched Paul closely after his snakebite. In other words, they never removed their eyes from him after they saw that viper hanging down from his hand. Without the snakebite, Paul would have just passed before the people of Malta as another criminal on his way to jail in Rome, but the snakebite singled him out. By that snakebite, Jesus Christ in Paul was lifted, and as He promised in John 12:31, He drew all the people to Himself. If God allows adversities in our lives, it is not meant to kill us but to highlight us. However, how we respond to those adversities will determine whether those who watch us will glorify God or spurn Him. I pray that we will understand the purpose of our trials and allow God to work through them for His glory and our blessing.