*DEVOTIONAL*

May 21 - 26

*Paul in Rome*

**Monday, May 21 Acts 28:1-6**

*“We learned that we were on the Island of Malta”*

The account of what happened on Malta is further evidence of how the Lord will use everything for his glory and our effectiveness. Paul could have been disgruntled. Instead he took the disaster in stride and gathered firewood to help warm and dry the soaked and weary travelers. Life presents us with a splendid succession of opportunities to put our faith into practical action. Often our best chances to share our faith result from caring in unspectacular ways for the people we long to introduce to the Savior. We earn the right to be heard.

But something happened to Paul while building the fire that was even more convincing than his practical helpfulness. A viper bit Paul’s hand. The natives who had kindly greeted the survivors now expressed the superstition of their culture. The viper’s attack was surely the just punishment of one they perceived to be a murderer. Paul, with customary calmness, shook the viper off his hand and went about his work of helping others. After a long time, when Paul was still very much alive, the natives decided that this was no murderer but a god!

*As I care for others, Lord, I will have the opportunity to witness to your love. Amen.*

**Tuesday, May 22 Acts 28:7-10**

*“Sick people came and were healed”*

It is interesting to note that Paul did not preach to the crowds while on Malta – at least not with words. His sermons were enacted healing miracles. He laid hands on the father of Publius, the leading citizen of the island. We can be sure that as he prayed for the old man’s fever and dysentery, he also shared with him the power of the One to whom he prayed. The result of the man’s healing was that other islanders came to Paul and were healed of their diseases.

Luke has given us further insight into the work of Paul. The living Lord was continuing his ministry through the Apostle – serving, revealing authority over a poisonous viper (Jesus had promised that in Mark 16:18), healing, and caring profoundly for people. Preaching the Gospel and the ministry of healing are inseparable. When healing is understood in the deeper context of salvation, wholeness, health, and ultimate well-being, we can practice both preaching and healing prayer as a part of Christ’s ministry through us.

*We pray for spiritual and physical healing, Lord, for ourselves and for others. Amen.*

**Wednesday, May 23 Acts 28:11-16**

*“Paul was encouraged and thanked God”*

This passage is more than a travelogue completing the last leg of the trip. It also gives us further evidence of the growing fellowship of the believers. We have seen the influence of friends on Paul’s life and his inclusive capacity to make deep friendships in Christ. This section adds two more examples of that, first in the visit of the believers in Puteoli and then in the welcome of the church at Rome through emissaries sent to meet Paul on the Appian Way. It is another sign of the way the Lord cared for his Apostle through the new family of brothers and sisters who were committed to Christ and to each other.

Paul had not anticipated arriving in Rome as a prisoner, but this made little difference to the Christians at Rome who, having received word of Paul’s arrival at Puteoli, could not wait to welcome him. His hero’s welcome meant a great deal to Paul. When he saw them, he thanked God. All the good things which happened to him were maximized by recognizing them as gifts of God.

*You encourage us through our Christian friends, Lord, and we are grateful. Amen.*

*DEVOTIONAL*

May 21 - 26

*Paul in Rome*

**Thursday, May 24 Acts 28:17-22**

*“Paul called together the local Jewish leaders”*

Paul never gave up on his fellow Jews. No more than three days after he arrived in Rome he called the leaders of the Jews together. After all that he had been through on his missionary journeys and then in Jerusalem and Caesarea, meeting hostility, rejection, and persecution from his countrymen everywhere, we could assume that he would not have wanted to meet with more of them.

But this was not the case with Paul; he had to share the Gospel. The hope of Israel was Jesus Christ, the Messiah. Because of that hope he was in chains, although he had done no wrong worthy of imprisonment or death. He was honest with the Roman Jews, admitting that the Jews in Jerusalem had found fault with him, and he explained to them that he had appealed to Caesar for justice. The first meeting with the leaders was concluded with their expression of willingness to hear what he had to say, although it was couched in the reserve they had about “this sect,” which they said was spoken against everywhere.

*May we never give up, Lord, on sharing you with others. Amen.*

**Friday, May 25 Acts 28:23-29**

*“He spoke to them about Jesus”*

When the second visit began, Paul got down to essentials. All day long he explained and testified to the true meaning of the kingdom of God and the fulfillment of the prophets and Moses in Jesus as Messiah. Luke uses the verb *exethitheto,* “expanded,” to indicate the exhaustive detail and care Paul used in explaining the Scriptures. Note that he began with the kingdom of God, his rule and reign over all history. Then he told them about Christ, the Messiah, king of that kingdom.

Verse 24 tells us of the mixed response. Some were persuaded, and some did not believe. Before they departed, Paul, grieved by their disbelief, repeated a passage from Isaiah 6:9-10, quoting God’s words to the prophet about Israel. The implication was that Paul believed that the passage described his listeners. It had also been used by Jesus in response to the disbelief of the Jews (John 12:40). Paul’s point was to show the leaders that they had come to the dreadful place of spiritual insensitivity. They heard words but did not understand; they saw truth but would not respond.

*Open people’s hearts, Lord, that they may be sensitive to the truth about you. Amen.*

**Saturday, May 26 Acts 28:30-31**

*“Boldly proclaiming the Kingdom of God”*

Acts does not conclude on the note of Jewish rejection of the gospel. Rather, Luke’s conclusion presents a more glorious reality: Paul has two years of bold witness about the Kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul probably wrote his Prison letters – Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon – at this time, though scholars are not unanimous about this. At the start of Acts Luke gave his key verse (1:8), which predicted that through the Holy Spirit the gospel would be proclaimed to the ends of the earth. The book ends with that prediction being fulfilled.

We cannot be sure of what Paul did after the events described in Acts. Tradition affirms that he was released from this imprisonment, had more evangelistic campaigns, and probably visited friends in Greece and Asia. Did he go to Spain during this time, as he had wished to (Romans 15:24, 28)? We cannot be sure. Paul was probably arrested again and wrote several additional letters during his second imprisonment in Rome. The last of these, 2 Timothy, speaks of his impending death. He was martyred sometime between A.D. 64 and 67.

*May we boldly proclaim your gospel, Lord, to the very ends of the earth. Amen.*