

Refuge

Acts 28:1-10 Sunday AM, March 19, 2023

Prelude – Scripture: Acts 27:39-28:10 When day came, they could not recognize the land; but they did observe a bay with a beach, and they resolved to drive the ship onto it if they could.⁴⁰ And casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea while at the same time they were loosening the ropes of the rudders; and hoisting the foresail to the wind, they were heading for the beach.⁴¹ But striking a reef where two seas met, they ran the vessel aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern *began* to be broken up by the force of the waves.⁴² The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, so that none of them would swim away and escape;⁴³ but the centurion, wanting to bring Paul safely through, kept them from their intention, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land,⁴⁴ and the rest *should follow*, some on planks, and others on various things from the ship. And so it happened that they all were brought safely to land.¹ When they had been brought safely through, then we found out that the island was called Malta.² The natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all.³ But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand.⁴ When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they *began* saying to one another, "Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live."⁵ However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm.⁶ But they were expecting that he was about to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and *began* to say that he was a god.⁷ Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and entertained us courteously three days.⁸ And it happened that the father of Publius was lying in bed afflicted with *recurrent* fever and dysentery; and Paul went in to see him and after he had prayed, he laid his hands on him and healed him.⁹ After this had happened, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases were coming to him and getting cured.¹⁰ They also honored us with many marks of respect; and when we were setting sail, they supplied us with all we needed.

What a storm! Some 2 weeks driven by the wind, fighting to keep the ship together, and most recently, the dangers of shallow water as they approached land—seeking to be kept from being bashed against the rocks. I'm not sure we can fully appreciate the situation, but we can appreciate fear, hopelessness when even the experts who have been through our specific storm are without hope—the chaos that ensues when you are tied to others feeling the same way or don't, but respond differently then you to the same circumstances. We're leaving the boat. NO YOU DON'T or we won't be delivered. I DON'T trust you. STAY with the boat! We've been talking about perseverance in II Peter 1, but not just about perseverance. We've talked about a perseverance that results from faith in God—a perseverance that perseveres ONLY because of God's divine power and a faith that clings not merely to our thoughts of God, but to His specific precious and magnificent promises. Paul exemplified this God-enabled perseverance by encouraging those on board to trust God's word concerning this voyage.²² "Yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but *only* of the ship."²³ "For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me,²⁴ saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.'²⁵ "Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told. These words not only buoyed his spirit, they freed him to go forward with the next steps of life lived according to His promises—for them, eating (some of us need to eat less or differently, but ALL of us need to live under the Providence of God). This Providence, provision from a watching and working God undergirded Paul's prayer as he thanked God in the storm.³⁴ "Therefore I encourage you to take some food, for this is for your preservation, for not a hair from the head of any of you will perish."³⁵ Having said this, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all, and he broke it and began to eat.³⁶ All of them were encouraged and they themselves also took food. This same providence that provided their food and the strength to fight to stay alive was what kept Paul and the prisoners alive when the soldiers wanted to kill them to protect their own futures. They were strong, but God's Providence was stronger! Praise Him, God-fearers! Give thanks to Him!

***Hymn (Powerpoint): O Give Thanks**

Today, the land they saw has a name—Malta. There were people there to care for them—a fire. Thankful to be alive and on shore, Paul gathers sticks for the fire, and, as if his day had not been impossible enough, he is bit by a viper, and the rest saw it clinging to him. Hurry, help him. NOPE, you're done! Help you with a fire—yes, but you are prisoners, and this one must have been really bad—a murderer. Justice caught him. You ARE right. This one IS a murderer. You ARE right. God brings justice. But there is more! God redeemed this murderer AND he is not in prison because of that murder. He is a prisoner because of the Christ who set him free. So he is NOT done. He has a work yet to do for Christ.⁵ However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm.⁶ But they were expecting that he was about to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. Sing of the grace of God by which we live!

***Hymn #201: Grace Greater Than Our Sin *Pastoral Prayer: Pastor Jahn Choir: Father of Light Scripture: Philippians 1:27–2:18**

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;²⁸ in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God.²⁹ For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,³⁰ experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.¹ Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion,² make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.³ Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;⁴ do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.⁵ Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.⁹ For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.¹² So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling;¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or disputing;¹⁵ so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world,¹⁶ holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.¹⁷ But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all.¹⁸ You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.

Offering: *Doxology: But after they had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and began to say that he was a god. How do YOU do when people think you are a god? Don't you want that—to be great, to have your voice, your needs listened to/ honored? Anytime you need approval for worth and settle for theirs, you have stopped short of the only approval that matters. You CAN please God! God said so. Believing this, you obey/serve him—through misjudging of others, through shipwrecks, through imprisonments—all the while saying with the psalmist and with the choir, "All praise to the name of the Father of light, One who listens and hears when I call. Every step He ordains, I shall walk without fear. In His light I'll not stumble or fall. Does that seem impossible to live? Then look to God and pray for a faith that will not shrink!

***Hymn #327 (Red)/Powerpoint: O for a Faith That Will Not Shrink**

The snake shaken off, I didn't die, but there is more gospel work to do. Where? With those surrounding them, of course. You want to do something significant with your life? Then serve God by serving the souls He has placed in His structures of home, church, and society the way He calls you to serve them. Suffering and sacrifice are part of it. How do you know? Just look at the Servant King described in Philippians 2 that you are to follow. He is the Living Head of His people. Study Him and follow!

***Hymn (Powerpoint): The Servant King**

Message: Refuge Acts 28:1-10 *Hymn #353: A Shelter in the Time of Storm Prayer