

Introduction

1. A few years ago I had a trip out to Kansas City for work and practically nothing went according to plan:
 - a. Going through TSA, my carry-on luggage got flagged so it had to be searched, and although nothing violated the TSA guidelines some overzealous mall-cop wannabe <grin> forced me to leave a number of the items behind
 - b. Then, my flight out of Columbus was delayed so when I landed for my layover I had to literally sprint to catch my next flight and broke a wheel on my suitcase in the process; when I arrived at the gate they were literally closing the door and I was dripping in sweat
 - c. When I landed in KC, there was a huge line at the rental car place; I waited an hour in line only to discover that they didn't have the vehicle I reserved
 - d. Then, instead of simply giving me another car, they made me wander around the parking lot with them for 20 minutes while they tried to find something they could rent me; I should probably tell you that it was also winter, and it would have been nice to have a hat and some gloves because I really didn't plan on 15 mph winds and a windchill close to zero
 - e. When I got to the hotel, I discovered that the heater was broken but when I went to the front desk they told me there were no other rooms available because there was a convention in town; fortunately, after some rather stern negotiations they were able to find a tech who was able to fix it
 - f. Now, I stay at the same hotel every time I travel to KS, and part of the reason is I love the fact that they have a chef who makes fresh, custom-ordered omelets for breakfast; he didn't show up so I had to settle for some fake, rubbery, egg-like substance that tasted like plastic
 - g. The rest of the trip was pretty much the same—I was there to do an office move, but neither the office manager nor the operations manager decided to show up; I guess they figured I'd do it all myself. Plus, the movers were over four hours late, didn't have all the equipment they needed, and didn't send enough guys
 - h. Later that night I started feeling funky, only to wake up the next morning with a splitting headache, body aches, and a ton of sinus pain and pressure that lasted the rest of the week
 - i. To cap it all off, my flight home got cancelled and I had to scramble to find another one
2. Nothing on this trip seemed to go as planned, and I'm pretty sure you've had times like this
3. We're in the final chapters of Acts where Paul is making his journey from Jerusalem to Rome and in many respects, nothing seemed to go as planned:
 - a. The Lord promised him that he would travel from Jerusalem to Rome—and he did but not without trials, tribulations, and obstacles along the way
 - b. He was beaten, arrested, nearly tortured, almost torn apart, tried before unjust governors, confined unjustly for over two years, caught in a typhoon, lost at sea, sent hundreds of miles off course, shipwrecked, tossed into the sea, and in our passage today spent three months on a tiny island
 - c. I think I can say with certainty that most of this was according to Paul's plan
4. Today we're going to see that even at times like this, God is still at work

A. The first thing we see is how the Lord showered Paul with kindness (READ Acts 28:1-2)

1. When they arrived on land, they discovered it was the island of Malta:
 - a. Malta was a small island 18 miles long by 8 miles wide and located about 60 miles south of Sicily:
 - 1) If you remember, back in 27:39 it says that when the sailors first caught sight of the island off in the distance, they didn't recognize it
 - 2) One of the reasons was they had been blown hundreds of miles off course in the hurricane, most of it without being able to see the sun or stars which were what they used for navigation; they had no idea which part of the sea they were located in
 - 3) A second reason is that they apparently landed on a beach on the south of the Island—an area now referred to as St. Paul's Bay; ships normally approached from the north because that's where the harbor was (at a place called Valletta)
 - 4) They didn't learn it was Malta until they came ashore, likely having been told by the natives
 - b. The inhabitants of the island were mostly Phoenician which aligns with Luke's reference to them as "**natives**"—the Greek, barbarians, simply refers to those who are neither Jew nor Greco-Roman
2. What stands out is their "**extraordinary kindness**":
 - a. As Luke does so often, he uses a bit of understatement to make his point; this is more literally, "**they continued (ongoing; imperfect) showing us no little kindness**"
 - b. There are different Greek words used in the NT that refer to kindness and this one reflects a genuine love for mankind
 - c. One of the things they do to express this kindness is to build a fire for Paul and the others because it was cold and raining:
 - 1) We need to keep in mind that it was late October or early November and the high temperatures at this time of year were generally around 50 degrees
 - 2) They were also soaking wet having just come out of the sea, and were likely exhausted from the swim as well
 - d. Luke also writes that the islanders "**received us all**":
 - 1) Most other translations render this as they "**welcomed us**" which better captures the nuance of the word Luke used
 - 2) It refers to taking someone to oneself or taking someone alongside
 - e. What we see here is truly extra-ordinary—or as the ESV puts it—"unusual" kindness
3. I want you to imagine for a moment how Paul and the other 275 men must have felt at this moment:
 - a. They just spent three months at sea, being beaten and battered by the wind and waves, adrift with no idea where they were or whether they would ever see land again
 - b. Verse 27:20 tells us that they had abandoned all hope of being saved
 - c. But then, just as God had promised, He delivers them all safely to land—every last one of them
 - d. And, when they get there, instead of finding a deserted island in the middle of nowhere, they arrive on Malta where they are warmly welcomed and showered with extraordinary kindness

4. Takeaway: isn't this the way God works sometimes? How often have you experienced Him showering you with kindness after going through a difficult or trying time?

B. The second thing we see is how the Lord protected Paul so he could complete his mission (READ Acts 28:3-6)

1. We've seen throughout Paul's ministry how God constantly protected him
2. Just in the last few chapters we've seen how He protected Paul from being beaten to death by an angry mob, torn apart by the Sanhedrin, two assassination plots, being handed over to the Jews by two Roman governors and King Agrippa, from a raging storm at sea, and a shipwreck!
3. Here we find another example of the Lord's protection:
 - a. To help maintain the fire, Paul tosses some brush onto the fire when a poisonous snake jumps out and latches onto his hand
 - b. All the natives see the snake hanging there on his hand, and he simply shakes it off, goes about his business, and suffers no ill effects
 - c. Since snakes were considered an agent of divine wrath, the natives immediately assume Paul is a murderer and expect him to die
 - d. However, after watching him for a long time with nothing happening to him, they change their tune and assume he's some kind of god
4. This may seem like a rather strange event, but it actually serves a couple of purposes:
 - a. One is that it reminds us of the protection God provided Paul so that he could complete the mission to which he can be called
 - b. Second, it established Paul's authority as God's messenger:
 - 1) It's something Jesus foretold: look at Luke 10:18-19 and Mark 16:18
 - 2) This was merely the first of many miraculous events on the island involving Paul that establishes his authority as God's messenger (later, he heals people)
5. Takeaway: when the Lord calls us for a specific purpose or task, He will protect us so that we can accomplish it...no matter what we face

C. The third thing we see is how the Lord used Paul even when it looked like things weren't going according to plan (READ Acts 28:7-9)
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1. The plan was for Paul to go to Rome:
 - a. Before he even arrived in Jerusalem, the Lord told him that he was sending him to Rome:
 - 1) The trip from Caesarea to Rome would normally take about five weeks
 - 2) So, I imagine that when Paul got on the ship that's what he expected—in five weeks he'd be testifying before Caesar...or so he thought
 - b. But, things didn't go according to plan:
 - 1) Instead on landing in Rome, he gets caught in a violent typhoon, gets blown hundreds of miles off course, suffers a shipwreck, and ends up on a tiny island far from his ultimate destination
 - 2) On top of that, it's Winter which means he has to stick around on this tiny dot for another three months before he can set back out for Rome

2. I don't want to presume too much on Paul's part, but if it were me I might be a little discouraged, maybe frustrated, and maybe even a little confused because things weren't going according to plan; I might even wonder if Jesus changed his mind and decided to leave me there on the island <grin>
3. But if we look at what happened during this three-month diversion, it's pretty incredible:
 - a. First, Paul heals the father of a very prominent man:
 - 1) Luke mentions a man named Publius and refers to him as **"the leading man of the island"** which could mean he was the governor or simply the most influential man on the island
 - 2) He lived in the same neighborhood where Paul and the men came ashore
 - 3) He welcomed Paul and the others (not clear if it was all 276 men) into his home and entertained them for three days
 - 4) During this time, Paul learned that his father was confined to bed with a fever and dysentery (a gastrointestinal illness, possibly Malta flu which was something caused by parasites from goats milk that was common on the island and could last for months or years)
 - 5) So Paul visits him, and after praying and laying his hands on him, heals him
 - b. Second, when word gets out **"the rest of the people on the island who had diseases were coming to him and getting cured"** (9)
 - c. Now, I'm going to go out on a limb here and suggest a third thing that happened even though it's not explicit in the text:
 - 1) You might have noticed that Luke doesn't mention Paul preaching the Gospel for these three months while he was on Malta
 - 2) We might assume, therefore, that he didn't but I believe that would be a wrong assumption
 - 3) With everything that we know about the Apostle Paul, can you imagine him living anywhere for three months, especially a place full of gentiles who had likely never heard the Gospel, healing and curing their sick...all without mentioning Jesus?
 - 4) I find that impossible to believe, and church tradition suggests Paul had a successful ministry on the island; though not as authoritative as the Scriptures, tradition says:
 - a) Publius was converted and became the first elder on Malta
 - b) He served the church there for 31 years before moving to Athens in AD 90 where he was martyred 35 years later (AD 125)
 - c) Though there's not a lot of historical information regarding Christianity on Malta, we have the names of church bishops from Malta in the records of two large church councils, the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451 and the Fifth General Council in AD 501
 - d) We also have the names of other church leaders in Malta in the sixth century
 - e) Essentially, we see within church tradition, a line of successive leaders or bishops who lead the church at Malta going all the way back to Publius which suggests that Paul did indeed have a fruitful ministry there
4. Takeaway: One of the things we can take away from this is that even though things don't always go according to our plan, it doesn't mean they aren't going according to God's plan

D. The fourth thing we see is how the Lord provided for Paul (READ Acts 28:10)
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1. What an incredible send off!
2. As Paul and the others prepared to leave the island, the islanders **“honored [them] with many marks of respect”**—this language is used elsewhere to refer to the giving of gifts
3. In addition, Luke wrote that **“they provided us with everything we needed”**—likely food, water, clothing, and other provisions necessary for the trip to Rome
4. Takeaway: one of the many advantages we have over the world is that we don’t have to worry about our needs because the Lord promises to meet them:
 - a. When Jesus sent out the 12 in Luke 9 he told them, **“3 And He said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, neither a staff, nor a bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not even have two tunics apiece. 4 "Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that city. 5 "And as for those who do not receive you, as you go out from that city, shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them."**—the implication was that God the Father would provide for their needs through the homes that welcomed them
 - b. When Jesus sent out the 70 he gave them similar instructions (READ Luke 10:2-11)
 - c. The same is true for us—God will provide for our needs just as He did Paul (READ Luke 12:22-31)

<p>E. The last thing we see is how the Lord encouraged Paul (READ Acts 28:11-15)</p>
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1. In a moment I want to draw your attention to verses 14-15
2. But before I do that I want to remind us of what the last three+ years have been like for Paul:
 - a. He arrived in Jerusalem in the Spring of AD 57 for Pentecost
 - b. Within two weeks, he was accosted by a mob of angry Jews while he was worshipping in the temple, dragged outside, and beaten
 - c. He was then arrested by the Romans, falsely accused of preaching against Moses, the Law, his own people, and of desecrating the temple
 - d. In his first defense before the mob, they responded in a frenzy and demanded his death
 - e. In response, the Roman commander ordered him to be tortured through scourging, something he narrowly escaped when he revealed that he was a Roman citizen
 - f. When he made his second defense (before the Sanhedrin), many are so enraged that he had to be rescued again by the Romans to prevent him from being torn apart
 - g. He then escaped an assassination attempt, was sent to Caesarea where he faced and unjust trial before a corrupt governor (Felix), and was then unfairly incarcerated for two years without a ruling
 - h. As if that wasn’t enough, he faced another failed assassination attempt, another unfair trial before a different governor (Festus), and a hearing before King Agrippa
 - i. But wait; there’s more! He set sail for Rome on a trip that should have been rather uneventful and taken no more than five weeks:
 - 1) Instead, this wonderful *cruise* lasted at least six months through the coldest and most dangerous time of year (Fall/Winter), and included (at no extra cost) a typhoon, getting lost at sea after having been blown hundreds of miles off course, “many days” without seeing the sun or stars, and days of being so seasick he didn’t eat
 - 2) To cap it all off, he got to make a 3-month excursion to a tiny island after the ship ran aground on a reef, forced him into the frigid waters of the Mediterranean Sea, where he enjoyed a delightful swim to the beach in the pouring rain and a balmy 50 degrees

- j. He finally arrived in Italy in the late Spring or Early summer of AD 60 which means that so far this wonderful adventure of a life time had lasted at least three years:
- 3. Now, look at verses 14 and 15 again (READ):
 - a. When Paul, Luke, and Aristarchus arrived in Italy at the port city of Puteoli, they found some Christians there and stayed with them for a week
 - b. Believers even came from the surrounding area, including two cities just to the northeast called the Market of Appius and Three Inns
 - c. Notice Paul's response when he saw these fellow believers: **"he thanked God and took courage"** (15b):
 - 1) Not only were the past three years a difficult and trying time for Paul physically, mentally, emotionally, and probably even spiritually, but they were spent with limited Christian fellowship
 - 2) He did have Luke and Aristarchus with him, and he was able to receive visitors when he was confined in the barracks in Jerusalem and in the governor's mansion for two years in Caesarea, but it's doubtful this amounted to the kind of fellowship Paul was used to experiencing on his journeys
 - 3) Plus, for most of the past six months he was surrounded by people steeped in Greco-Roman religion:
 - a) From the 270+ sailors, prisoners, and Roman soldiers on the ship to a tiny island full of gentiles
 - b) Even if some of them were saved during the journey, their spiritual maturity level would have been limited just due to time
 - c) And face it, as exciting and refreshing as it can be to be around new believers and baby Christians, sometimes you just long for the fellowship of Godly, mature, believers who have been seasoned over time
 - d) I believe that's what we see here with Paul—when he saw these well-established believers from in and around Puteoli he thanked God and was encouraged
 - 4. Takeaway: there's no question about the need for fellowship with other believers; it's one of the ways the Lord encourages us:
 - a. It's demonstrated, encouraged, and commanded in the Bible
 - b. Through it we find strength, encouragement, and thanksgiving