

ACTS: ALIGNING WITH GOD'S SOVEREIGN WORK OF DISCIPLING

LXIII. God's Great Use Of A Little Selfless Act

(Acts 28:1-10)

I. Introduction

- A. The book of Acts explains "the orderly and sovereignly directed progress of the kingdom message from Jews to Gentiles, and from Jerusalem to Rome," *Bible Know. Com., N. T.*, p. 351. We can thus learn much about aligning our ministry efforts with God's sovereign work from studying the book of Acts.
- B. Acts 28:1-10 records a little selfless act by Paul and how God greatly used it to open a door for an effective ministry on the Island of Malta. We view the passage for our insight, application, and edification (as follows):

II. God's Great Use Of A Little Selfless Act, Acts 28:1-10.

- A. After all 276 people on board the wrecked ship had made it to land at Malta, the islanders who were non-Greek-speaking people (called *barbaroi* in the Greek text, *Ibid.*, p. 429) showed the shipwrecked people unusual kindness, kindling a fire and welcoming them to Malta due to the rain and the cold, Acts 28:1-2.
- B. Paul himself was wet, tired and cold, having come through many days of stress only to have to swim in the pounding surf and rain to shore, so he could easily have spent his time just sitting by the fire getting dry and warm. However, he considered the needs of others around him, and busied himself with gathering a bundle of sticks to lay on the fire for the welfare of other cold and tired shipwrecked people, Acts 28:3a.
- C. God used this little selfless act in a great way to give Paul an effective ministry on Malta, Acts 28:3b-10:
 - 1. Since the weather was cold, a snake in the woodpile would initially be "stiff and lethargic" (*Ibid.*), so when one would gather sticks that contained a poisonous snake, it would be relatively harmless for the gatherer. However, the fire's heat would warm up the snake and drive it out of the flames in an "attack" mode at any human nearby since it would think that the human was trying to kill it by the fire! (*Ibid.*)
 - 2. Thus, when Paul laid his sticks on the fire, a poisonous viper that had either been in the sticks Paul put on the fire or in the woodpile that was in flames came out of the heat and bit him so ferociously that it fastened itself on his hand, dangling there in plain sight before all the onlookers, Acts 28:3b.
 - 3. The islanders saw the snake hanging on Paul's hand, so they concluded that he was likely a murderer who, though having escaped death by the sea, was now getting justice and would die by snake bite, Acts 28:4.
 - 4. However, Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no harm (Acts 28:5), and when the islanders watched him for a long time, expecting him to have swollen up or suddenly fallen down dead by the enormous amount of venom that would have been inserted into his body by the serpent's literally hanging on his hand, but only to suffer no harm, they changed their minds to think that Paul was a god, Acts 28:6.
 - 5. Luke did not record Paul's reaction to this claim, but we are sure that much like his response to the similar claim of him and Barnabas at Lystra in Acts 14:8-18, Paul would have corrected their errant claim. (*Ibid.*) He would have clarified that he was a mere man who was a messenger of the Most High God, and likely have launched into a presentation of the Gospel of Christ.
 - 6. Near the scene of the shipwreck were lands that were owned by the chief man of the island named Publius, and he received the shipwrecked people and entertained them hospitably for three days, Acts 28:7.
 - 7. In this meeting with Publius, Paul heard that Publius' father lay sick with a fever and dysentery, so Paul visited him and prayed for the man, putting his hands on him and healing him, Acts 28:8.
 - 8. That healing event gained the same response that Jesus did when He began to heal people in His earthly ministry – it led the rest of the people on the island who had diseases to come to Paul for healing, and they were healed, giving opportunity for Paul to evangelize these people, Acts 28:9 with Mark 1:40-45.
 - 9. In the end, the people greatly honored Paul and his shipmates so that when they prepared to sail on another ship after the winter was past, the islanders put on board ship whatever they needed, Acts 28:10 ESV.

Lesson: *When Paul in consideration of the needs of others around him postponed addressing his own needs to get warm and dry by the fire to go and gather more sticks for the fire, God used that little selfless act to open up a ministry for Paul on the whole Island of Malta.*

Application: *(1) Whenever we have opportunity, may we perform thoughtfully considerate acts of kindness that God can use to open doors of effective ministry for His glory. (2) If we perform a considerate act of kindness and find it initially threatening or harmful as in Paul's case of getting snake bitten, may we handle the situation as sensibly as possible, like Paul's shaking the snake off into the fire, and wait on the Lord to lead us from there.*