

## MINISTRY IN MALTA

TEXT: ACTS 28:1-10

### **I. THE WELCOME**

Acts 28:1, 2: “And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita. And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.”

Romans 12:9-13: “Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.”

Hospitality is spoken of in the most favorable terms in the Bible. In Greek, the word is φιλοξενία (*philoxenia*) meaning to entertain strangers; one who is a lover of strangers.

The Bible says we are to be “...given to hospitality.” The word “given” is translated from the Greek word: διώκω (*diōkō*). The definition is most interesting; it means to run swiftly in order to catch a person or thing, to run after; to press on; figuratively it is one who in a race runs swiftly to reach the goal. From what we observe, we as God’s people are to be aggressively pursuing hospitality.

A pastor is required to be hospitable. I Timothy 3:2: “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach.”

We need to get to the place that we love being hospitable without grudging.

Titus 1:8: “But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate.” I Peter 4:9: “Use hospitality one to another without grudging.”

The word “barbarous,” was used when speaking of the residents of Melita (Malta). In ancient times this is a term that simply referred to a non-Greek or a person outside the Roman empire. The Maltese citizens were anything but savage, uncivilized, primitive or without culture as the term has come to an understanding as the years transpired. The people of Malta went out of their way to be kind. They made a fire to bring warmth to these shipwrecked passengers. And they were indiscriminate in their hospitality. Keep in mind, this island had not yet been evangelized! If the unconverted can be hospitable, how much more should Christians show forth this benign attitude toward one and all. Romans 12:18: “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.”

### **II. THE SERPENT**

Acts 28:3: “And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand.”

After the fall of man, God cursed the serpent who was used of Satan to tempt Eve. The Bible says in Genesis 3:15, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” Also, we see the serpent is associated with poison: Psalm 58:4: “Their poison is like the poison of a serpent:

they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear.” Psalm 140:3: “They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips. Selah.” The poison of a serpent or asp is further likened to sin. Romans 3:13: “Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips.” God identifies Satan with the original creature He used to help bring about the fall of mankind. Revelation 20:2: “And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years.”

Paul will soon arrive at his desired destination—Rome, the center of the known world. Here God will use Paul, as well as those who would follow; and He will use this city as the launching pad for the Gospel to take the “Good News,” to the uttermost parts of the world. Therefore, it is not hard to believe that that Old Serpent, the Devil would love to kill Paul before he made it to Rome. Paul said in II Corinthians 10:4: “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.” Through God’s power, Paul had the ability to pull down the mighty strongholds of Satan. Although the Devil knew this, he is wickedly tenacious to never stop trying to thwart the plan and purposes of God.

### **III. THE PRESUMPTION**

Acts 28:4: “And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.”

The natural, human tendency when so-called bad things happen to people is to presume they deserve it. They believe the person has done something wrong to bring this upon him. One false religion calls this the pay-back of karma. Joseph was sold into Egypt, falsely imprisoned and separated for many years from his family. And yet, God brought him into the kingdom of Pharaoh to be the highest-ranking man in all of Egypt. When he disclosed his identity to his brothers, he reminded them in Genesis 50:20: “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.”

What the world would call the saddest day in one’s life, for the Christian would actually be the best day of his or her life. I am, of course, referring to the day of one’s death. Ecclesiastes 7:1: “A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one’s birth.” Isaiah 57:1: “The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come.” The Word of God points out that some are taken in death to deliver them from something worse in life.

### **IV. THE DELIEVERANCE**

Acts 28:5, 6: “And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.”

The people of Malta had never seen anything like this. In their mythology, they naturally presumed that only a god or demigod could be unaffected by the lethal bite of this serpent. This was a fulfilment of Mark 16:17, 18: “And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;

They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.”

They jumped to the very wrong conclusion, but the Lord used it to get their attention.

## **V. THE OPPORTUNITY**

Acts 28:8, 9: “And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him. So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed.”

Publius was Chief Magistrate of Malta, much like a governor. His father was dying. So, Paul, who had quickly gained a reputation of one who conquered the challenge of death itself, was summoned to the bed of the dying man. The man was miraculously healed, which in turn, brought others from all over the island to be healed. And as we see throughout the New Testament, healing was used as a segue to the conversion of the soul. Jesus illustrated this in Matthew 9:5, 6: “For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.”

## **VI. THE TESTIMONY**

Acts 28:10: “Who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary.”

What kind of testimony are we leaving in our community, our family and in Christ’s Church? As of this day there are approximately 360 churches on the island of Malta. Now we know these do not all represent the true New Testament Christianity as originally intended by the teaching and doctrine of Paul, but it does certainly show that Paul and his ministry of the Gospel had a lasting effect!

-Pastor Pope-