

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Paul Gunn, Pastor

BEING SHIPWRECKED DOESN'T HAVE TO BE SO BAD

Acts 27:39-Acts 28:10

January 9, 2021

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INTRODUCTION: Paul and his shipmates were en route to Rome, but unfortunately, they took an unexpected detour as a result of a terrible storm. In today's scripture, we read about their shipwreck near the shores of Malta. I want you to listen to the parallels to our own everyday lives. Oftentimes, we get sidetracked, derailed, detoured, and sometimes getting off course seems as grand as a shipwreck.

Today's message has three points:

1. The selfish only looked out for themselves.
2. The rush to judgment was flawed.
3. One person's hospitality led to many blessings.

1-THE SELFISH ONLY LOOKED OUT FOR THEMSELVES

SCRIPTURE: ACTS 27:39-44

When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could. ⁴⁰ Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach. ⁴¹ But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf. ⁴² The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. ⁴³ But the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. ⁴⁴ The rest were to get there on planks or on other pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land safely.

EXPLANATION: If a prisoner escaped from a Roman soldier's custody, the Roman soldier could be executed for his negligence. So, it makes sense that the soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners rather than take any chances. However, Paul had gained favor with the centurion. It would not be fair to kill all the other prisoners and not kill Paul, so the soldiers killed no one. Every man was left to figure out how to get to land, and all reached the island safely.

ILLUSTRATION: On Sunday, April 14, 1912, the Titanic, which had been deemed unsinkable, hit an iceberg and sank, killing more than 1,500 passengers. The entire story of the Titanic is riddled with miscalculations and mistakes that led to the disaster, including the fact that there were way too few lifeboats. Even worse, most of the lifeboats were set afloat half-full of people. As the ship went down, and the remaining passengers jumped or were flung into the sea, only one of those half-empty lifeboats returned to retrieve more people. When later questioned, the remaining survivors said they did not go back because of the fear that the thrashing swimmers or the suction of the sinking ship would pull them into the sea as well. Those in the lifeboats were not willing to lose their position of safety in order to save someone else.

APPLICATION: Their behavior is rather typical for us as humans. The Roman soldiers, like many of the Titanic survivors, were more concerned with saving their own skin than the lives of the people in their care. After having battled through the storm together, with land in sight, the Roman soldiers were ready to kill their prisoners. Even though Paul assured them at least twice that everyone would be saved, they were prepared to end the prisoners' lives instead of risking their escape.

Not much has changed since Paul's day. Not much has changed since the night the Titanic sank. Our society promotes this idea of looking out for ourselves. We are taught from an early age that if we do not take care of ourselves, no one else will, but the Bible teaches Christians to have a different perspective. Scriptures remind us to think of others first, to look out for each other, and to love one another more than we love ourselves.

2-THE RUSH TO JUDGEMENT WAS FLAWED

SCRIPTURE: Acts 28:1-6

Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. ² The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. ³ Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. ⁴ When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, “This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, the goddess Justice has not allowed him to live.” ⁵ But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. ⁶ The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead; but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.

EXPLANATION: Malta is the largest of the three major islands that constitute the Maltese Islands. It is located in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, south of Italy and north of Libya. The island is 17 miles long and 9 miles wide with a total area of about 95 square miles. The islanders quickly spotted the ragtag bunch swimming and floating to their shore.

I wonder if Paul and the other prisoners were marked in any way to indicate that they were jailbirds? I doubt they had striped uniforms or orange jumpsuits, and they wouldn't have been able to float or swim if they wore shackles. While the islanders initially showed them kindness, it's obvious that they were aware of who they were, and they were quick to make a judgment about Paul.

Let me contextualize this a bit. If I threw brush onto a fire and some creature jumped out of that fire and bit me, you would immediately try to help me. You would call 911. But the islanders were caught up in so much superstition that their first thought was not to help Paul but to think he was getting what he deserved.

With this viper, I like how the Bible said Paul shook it off. The Greek word here that is translated “shake off” is the same Greek word used in Luke 9:5 where Jesus said, “If the people do not welcome you, leave their town and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.” I want to point out to you that the scripture

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does not say he fought off the dangerous viper, he just shook it off...and in a very strong, symbolic way, he was shaking off their false judgment of him.

ILLUSTRATION: Thinking back on the story of the Titanic, you have to wonder why the lifeboats were only half-full to begin with. Why were more people not put aboard as soon as the ship started going down? Rumors of selfishness and mismanagement abound, but one of the primary reasons why more people were not saved has to do with judgments. Many of the passengers on board the Titanic simply did not believe that the ship was sinking. They were confident that the situation was not as bad as it seemed and were unwilling to leave the relative security and comfort of the ship to get aboard a crowded, unsteady lifeboat that would float aimlessly in the cold, dark sea for hours. They believed another ship would reach them in time. Of course, they were wrong. The Titanic sank in under three hours, and the rescuing ship arrived an hour and a half after, but there were very few to rescue. Almost all the people who had remained on the boat had jumped or fallen into the icy water and died.

APPLICATION: We humans are very judgmental. To some degree, we have to be. After all, a judgment is an opinion or decision that is based on what we think, and every day we are faced with circumstances that require us to decide. While most of our day-to-day choices are not as life-threatening as whether or not to get on a lifeboat, they are nonetheless important. This is especially true when it involves how we perceive and interact with other people.

Because Paul was a prisoner, the islanders thought he deserved his pain. They played judge and jury without even knowing why Paul had been arrested. How many times have I pointed out mob mentality in the scripture? Then, when God saved Paul, they did a complete turnaround. Within a short span of time, Paul went from murderer to a god. So they went from one superstition to another.

How often are we like those islanders?

- We size up a person based on a quick interaction and then treat them accordingly.
- We think people are intentionally being difficult when often their minds are just elsewhere.

- We accuse people of neglect when they may just be sad or preoccupied.
- We get angry at others but forget that they may have had a terrible day.

Let's not make hasty judgments about the people around us, and if we have to err, let's err on the side of kindness. Our rush to judgment is usually as flawed as the islanders' judgment of Paul.

1. The selfish only looked out for themselves.
2. The rush to judgement was flawed.

3-ONE PERSON'S HOSPITALITY LED TO MANY BLESSINGS

SCRIPTURE: Acts 28:7-10

There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and showed us generous hospitality for three days. ⁸ His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. ⁹ When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. ¹⁰ They honored us in many ways; and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed.

EXPLANATION: Paul's snakebite incident took him from a fireside camp to the home of the top island official. We do not know exactly who was invited, but we can assume that Paul, Luke (his traveling companion and author of our narrative), the captain, and maybe the centurion were there. For three days they were treated with the best hospitality the island could offer. Then, Paul became aware of Publius's father. The father was not just ill. He was sick with dysentery. In case you do not know, dysentery is a type of painful intestinal ailment that debilitates the whole body. It is often the result of poor sanitation, is often spread through contaminated food and water, and can be contagious. Did I mention that Paul and his companions were most likely staying in the same home as this man?

Paul was well-educated. I'm sure the sailors were well versed in illnesses like this. They most likely recognized this disease and wanted to avoid it at all costs. But Paul did not just express his sympathy. He did not say, "I'll pray for him." Paul

went to the man, prayed over him, placed his hands on him, and then healed him. Could God have healed the man without Paul touching him? Absolutely. Paul's presence was not needed to exhibit God's power. Paul's touch was not necessary for miraculous healing, but both of those things were essential ways in which Paul communicated love.

All of this happened because Publius offered his hospitality to complete strangers. My guess is that he knew who Paul was and was honored to host him. No doubt, Paul's travels and miracles made him a curiosity.

Publius could have ignored the foreigners in his land. As island administrator, he was a busy man. Caring for his sick father made him even busier. But because he offered hospitality, his father was healed and in turn, many more were healed. And while Luke does not record this, we know from earlier in Acts that healings were used to introduce Jesus to people.

ILLUSTRATION: As the Lord wills, I believe we will have an opportunity to offer hospitality to a family who does not yet know Jesus. As you know, I've become connected with three families left behind in Afghanistan. One day we had fervent prayer for a woman and her sons. They got out safely. Right now, a second family will soon try to escape the demon-possessed Taliban. This is a developing story, and I'll be letting you know more. As the Lord wills, we will have the divine opportunity to be hospitable to a doctor and his family who want to come to America.

APPLICATION: As Christians, we are shipwrecked on this earth until we die and go to Heaven, or Christ returns and calls us home. While we are here, God has not called us to live in isolation. Every day we meet and engage with a variety of people, and every day we have a choice in how we interact with those around us.

- We can be like the selfish Roman soldiers and look out for ourselves, cutting off those who cause us inconvenience or harm.
- We can be like the islanders and make hasty judgments, condemning or elevating people based on their circumstances and our opinions.
- Or we can be like Paul and show love that goes beyond human nature, reaching out to all.

INVITATION: Jesus lived a life of love and sacrifice and gave himself willingly on our behalf. Are you imitating his example?

- Maybe you need to ask God to forgive you for using people, for judging people, for thinking more of yourselves than your neighbor.
- Maybe you need to grab someone along the way and ask forgiveness for your behavior toward them.
- Or, if you've never truly repented of sin and surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus in your life, then it may seem only natural that you look out for yourself. You may think no one else will, but let me assure you there is one who loved you so much that he gave his life to save yours. His name is Jesus. If you do not love him, you can never fully appreciate the benefit of loving others. Come to the altar and let me tell you more about our Savior.

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Thanks to Jennifer Anderson for her editing assistance.

Sincerely, Paul Gunn
Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Nashville, Tennessee
USA