

## 44. Healing through helping

June 22, 2014

Can you imagine yourself being in the midst of a life storm that shook your world violently? Maybe you don't have to imagine it, because you are in the middle of that storm. You are drained, worn out physically, emotionally, or financially, maybe even spiritually as well. You feel like there are so many people and things that are against you for no good reason. You feel the hurt from them in your heart.

Then you get a phone call from your friend of the church. She is pouring out her heart to you for the really bad situation she is experiencing. All of sudden, you have a choice to make immediately – you can tell her that you are in your own mess and you don't want to hear someone else's problems, or you can listen to her and pray with her and ask the Lord to give her wisdom and strength to handle the situation.

As the Lord guides you, you choose the latter. While you are listening to her problem patiently, the Holy Spirit ever so gently reminds you of the perfect Bible verse to give her so that the Lord imparts the insight with her. As soon as you speak, you can almost hear a light bulb go off in her head. She gets it and is strengthened by the Lord. She thanks you repeatedly as she hangs up the phone.

After you put your phone back on the phone base, you realize that your situation hasn't changed one bit, but your heart is changed for the better. Your hurt is not as bad as before. Now you can even see your own situation from the higher viewpoint, much closer to the viewpoint of God.

That's what we are going to see in the encounter with apostle Paul. He and 275 people were in a ship that was tossed around like a little toy boat in the Mediterranean Sea for fourteen days and nights. They finally had run aground on an island. As the waves battered what was left of the broken ship, the people who arrived on the shore were looking much like human debris – soaked, hungry, and shivering in cold air and sea water. But everyone was safe just as the Lord assured them through Paul.

I believe that the Lord is going to speak to all of us about healing through helping from the example of apostle Paul this morning.

### A. WELCOME TO MALTA

*Acts 28:1-2 Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta. 2 And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold.*

Located about fifty miles south of Sicily, Malta is a rugged Mediterranean island some 18 miles long and 8 miles wide. In Paul's day, the island was also known as 'Melita' which meant "Refuge".

When we read the word 'the natives' in NKJV and NASB, or 'the barbarous people' in KJV, they give us an impression of primitive people with loin cloths and spears in their hands. The people in Malta were as advanced as any of the Roman empire because Malta was in a part of the trade route to Rome from Egypt. During that time, to the Romans and Greeks, anyone who did not speak their proud Koine Greek was considered 'barbarian.' But the island people proved to be kind and sympathetic to Paul and his people.

They immediately set up a fire to warm these shipwrecked travelers. I am sure that many of the Malta residents brought out their warm foods to fill their empty stomachs and dry clothing for them to change into. God was using these people to take care of the people who were with Paul.

## **B. FROM A CRIMINAL TO A GOD**

*Acts 28:3-6 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 on his hand. 4 So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live." 5 But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. 6 However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.*

After all he had done for the passengers in the ship during the storm, Paul could well have requested a place right next to the fire and insisted that everybody serve him. Instead, he did his share of the work and helped gather a bundle of sticks for the fire. No task is too small for the servant of God who has the mind of Christ.

*Philippians 2:3-8 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.*

How we serve the Lord today will help determine our reward and ministry when He comes to establish His kingdom on earth. Faithfulness to the Lord and for His kingdom now is preparation for blessed service later.

No servant of God is indispensable. If we don't make ourselves available to the Lord, He will simply take another servant's availability. It is our loss, not His.

*Esther 4:13-14 And Mordecai told them to answer Esther: "Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. 14 For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"*

If you've gone through your life storm – whether it was financial difficulty, marital problem, divorce, diminishing health, or troubling family dynamics, the Lord might bring others who are going through similar situations like you. You can minister to them like no other, because you know that deep emotional turmoil you had to deal with. Open yourself to the Lord and let Him use you to speak to them with His wisdom, love, and gentleness.

*2 Corinthians 1:3-4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*

Diana Mertens is a good example of this. If there is anyone who has an excuse to be bitter, it would be her for her Multiple Sclerosis that binds her to a wheelchair . But don't ever think that she doesn't serve the Lord and others. She is in charge of our email prayer chain and she is a prayer warrior . She receives your prayer requests by email and cascades them to fellow believers in the church.

But what would happen if you choose not to help, or even choose not to allow God to minister to you during the life storm? You will isolate yourself, start to blame your situation on everything and everyone else including the Lord. You will become bitter toward them including the people who are around you and love you, even toward God whom you once loved.

Then, you will become a prisoner of your own prison while you are holding the key of that prison – the prison of physical, emotional, and spiritual isolation. And that is exactly where satan wants you to be – away from your loving God. Get out of there by reaching out to the Lord and other believers.

If you don't, soon, bitterness will turn to malice. Instead of waiting upon the Lord to take care you and the horrible situation, you want to be a spiritual, emotional, or even physical vigilante. You want to do something against that person no matter what. That is what we call 'malice'. You turn from a victim to a revenger without God's guidance.

*Romans 12:19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.*

The insidious thing about malice is that it demands us to act. However , there is a law of retribution in this world declaring that the person who maliciously seeks to destroy others ends up destroying himself. Malice doesn't please the Lord whether it is acted upon or it is nothing more than a thought.

Remember this, please: Demons are at work where there is anger -lingering hearts. As long as you stay in the area of bitterness, malice, and vengeance, you are not on the same side with the Lord.

Some of you may have watched a National Geographic Channel program, "Snake Salvation" which shows a small number of Pentecostal churches in the rural areas of Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Ohio. They are usually characterized as a part of the Holiness movement which began in the early 20th century. One of their so-called biblical bases is this portion of Acts 28:3-6.

They try to show their holiness, anointing , godliness, and faith in God by handling poisonous snakes during their church services. But the problem is that many of those snake handling preachers died with snake bites. I don't play 'chicken' with a 18 wheeler to show my faith in God.

During any time of healing and recovering from depression, abuse, or some crisis, there is the danger of others misunderstanding our pain. These Malta islanders misinterpreted Paul's snakebite as divine retribution for the murder they assumed Paul committed. To them, this was the punishment and proof of his guilt. The Greek word of 'justice' here in v4 is ""dike"". It actually has a reference to the Greek goddess of justice.

Remember Job's so-called counselors? They held the same assumption against Job, didn't they? To them, Job's problems could only be a result of unconfessed sin. When calamity strikes our lives, others may tell us, "Obviously, God is disciplining you. Clean up your life before it's too late." But that assumption and advice is based on false theology. Snakebite on Paul didn't prove wrongdoing, any more than hard times always imply hidden sin.

By the way, some Christians think that they have the gift of criticism. Guess what? It is not from God and you do not find it in the Bible. If you've been exercising it freely to others and enjoy watching their pain, stop it in the name of Jesus, rather, encourage others and pray for them.

When Paul didn't drop dead after the snakebite, the people thought that he was a god. See how people's thought about Paul or you can change from one extreme to the other? This is all the more reason we must be cautious about what others think of us, either for good or bad.

God didn't preserve Paul from the storm just to let him perish by a snake. Paul was protected. It was promised he would go to Rome, and Paul wasn't at Rome yet. It wasn't so much that nothing would stop Paul as it was that nothing would stop God's promise from being fulfilled. Until you finish what you are supposed to do by the Lord, you are invincible. Paul could take God's past faithfulness as a promise of future blessing and protection.

### **C. MINISTERING TO OTHERS**

*Acts 28:7-10 In that region there was an estate of the leading citizen of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days. 8 And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him. 9 So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed. 10 They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary.*

This is a totally God thing. The Lord brought Paul and his fellow passengers, soldiers, and ship crew to be at this Roman official's estate and the father of the official needed healing from the Lord.

They wintered in Malta for three months. Dr. Luke doesn't say what Paul did after he healed Publius' father. I don't think that he just sat under a palm tree near the beach and drank a glass of coconut juice and ate sushi. I am sure that he was busy evangelizing and teaching the Word of God to the people of Malta until he and the rest of the people left that island.

### **D. APPLICATIONS**

1) To know love, open your heart to Jesus; to show love, open your heart to others.

2) The one who is helped by the Lord from life storm will be better equipped to help others.

3) Do not assume a person's character and life by the situation he or she is going through, because we only see a small portion of the entire picture.