

(Running the Race to the End)

- *God's protection of Paul when bitten by the viper, and the testimony that was to God's power; likewise healing of Publius' father; the completion of the journey, and the encouragement provided by God's people.*

The Rescue

- Hope on the ship from God grew into God's provision
 - that provision has now been fully realised as they are rescued, making it safely to shore without loss of life
 - once ashore they are looked after by the islanders (v.2) and shown unusual kindness, fire lit, etc
 - at last the little band of missionary prisoners can relax - God has heard their prayers, and they are safe...
- At least until **Paul helps with the fire!**
 - and is bitten by a poisonous snake
 - (sheltering from the cold and rain... driven out by the heat of the fire... angry and confused...)
 - and bites Paul
- I find the reaction of the Maltese intriguing:
 - interpreting the snake bite first as a sign of Paul's badness - a murderer, who the gods are not going to let off...
 - but then, as God protects him, interpreting this all as a sign of the blessing of the gods...
- God has rescued, but there is as yet no **explanation** of what has happened, no clear pointing of the people to God
 - problem Paul faced elsewhere, notably at **Lystra** in **Acts 14:8-18** where healing a crippled man was interpreted by the crowd as them being Zeus and Hermes!!
 - still today, whether when God chooses to heal people miraculously, or more mundanely when compassion and care are offered in Christ's name, there is the **danger of misinterpretation without explanation**

The Ministry

- Paul **takes the opportunity, the opening, presented by this incident**
 - bringing something of God's kingdom, where health is restored and (we here must infer) Paul explained the gospel
 - healing was done through prayer (so inevitably asking "**prayer to whom?**")
- Sometimes bringing something of God's care and love will be resisted
 - saw article on BBC website this afternoon about a nurse who has been suspended for offering to pray for a patient
 - but sometimes, as here, it is welcomed
 - at what level we don't know - is there more than "**he's healed my father**" in Publius' reaction? Is there more than **he's a miracle worker** in the crowd's reaction?
 - we don't know - but such a reaction should not be despised because it can be the first step to fuller understanding, the opportunity to explain from whom the healing came, from whom the help came
- Why are all you Christians such nice people?
 - there is an opportunity for us, every day, to minister in words and actions that should provoke that reaction!

The Journey

- **Syracuse (v.12)** is on Sicily, north of Malta
- **Rhegium (v.13)** is on mainland Italy, at Straits of Messina - narrow channel between Sicily and the mainland
- **Puteoli (v.13)** is a port south of Rome:
 - not Ostia, the main port of Rome, which was further north at the mouth of the

Tiber

- but one where the Alexandrian grain ships arrived, and other ships from all over the Roman world
 - it also was the main hub for goods exported from Campania
 - the Roman naval base at nearby Misenum housed the largest naval fleet in the ancient world
 - near where Naples is now, and about 110 miles south of Rome by land
- From Puteoli to Rome by the Appian Way
 - Forum of Appius was a town on the Appian Way about 50 miles south of Rome - in other words, a significant distance from Rome
 - Three Taverns was another stopping off point on the Appian Way, this one about 30 miles south of Rome

Notes

- Hospitality of the Christians
 - was clearly an encouragement to Paul (v.15), seeing as he did God's hand in their help
 - eg Viz a Viz team coming to Dundee for the Christian Focus Week at St Paul's
 - accept it - don't try to be too independent
 - offer it - don't think folk will be OK!

Conclusion

- And so the stage is set for the conclusion of our narrative
 - Paul, and the gospel message, has arrived in Rome
 - in chains, as Jesus himself finished his life a prisoners in Jerusalem
- I wonder whether we think we need to proclaim the gospel in strength or in weakness?
 - do we assume God could do better if someone else preached the gospel in our situation? If Karl Martin was minister in Fintry? If someone we admire was in our workplace, alongside our friends...?
 - Paul's example and Jesus' own example says thinking this way is rubbish!
- Acts starts with injunction to preach from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth... (1:8)
 - God's purposes are being fulfilled...