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Evaluating – Acts 28:1-6

I. INTRODUCTION – Mark 16:15-18

A. Tornado

1. = The city of Greensburg, Kansas was recently the center of news because a tornado wiped out a large portion of the town.
2. = There's been several reports over the last few years about tornados & the havoc they create.
3. = [Story of tornado in Park Forest @ 7]
4. = Today, whenever I hear about a tornado, I remember the half hour of terror I spent= one night in Park Forest when I was 7.

B. Terror at Sea

1. = As we come to our text today, the Apostle Paul & his companions haven't just endured a 20 mins or even a whole night of terror.
2. = It's been **2 weeks**, 14 days—of unrelenting dread. Here's what happened . . .
 - a. Paul & some other prisoners are on their way to Rome to be tried by Caesar.
 - b. Traveling with Paul is a small group of his friends, including Luke who wrote this.
 - c. They're on a cargo ship filled with grain headed for Rome, which was always desperate for more grain.
 - d. While Rome's need for food never ended, there are seasons of the year when sailing in the Mediterranean is dangerous.
 - e. Anytime between late September & early November extremely risky but to sail after that is suicide.
 - f. Because of that, shipments of grain were able to secure huge profits for any sea

captain intrepid enough to bring his ship safely into port.

g. The captain of Paul's ship thought he had the skill to get the job done so he was sailing these waters long after most ships had gone to harbor.

3. = Paul had warned both the commander guarding the prisoners & the captain of the ship they ought to take shelter at the island of Crete, but the captain scoffed & convinced the commander he knew what he was doing.

4. = So they set sail. As soon as they hit open water, a massive storm with hurricane force winds hit them.

5. = There was no sailing against it so they had to just let the storm drive them.

6. = The waves were so fierce, they had to put ropes around the hull to keep the ship from breaking apart.

7. = The clouds were thick so there were no stars to navigate by. Soon they were lost.

8. = This lasted for **14 days**, during which they ate nothing; the terror that gripped them stole their appetite.

9. = When the waves rose & threatened to swamp the ship, they threw out all the deck cargo so it would be lighter & rise higher out of the water. When the waves got **even higher** they even threw overboard the ship's tackle.

10. After 2 weeks of unrelenting terror, they were **exhausted & emotionally numb**.

11. Luke says all 276 passengers lost hope of surviving; they just waited to die.

12. But then an angel appeared to Paul & told him they'd all make it & he would eventually travel to Rome where he'd appear before Caesar.

13. Paul then told the commander & encouraged them all to eat something.

a. They'd need strength for the coming ordeal.

b. Paul knew while all would survive, the ship would not.

14. They ate, & when the crew took soundings they realized they were approaching land.

a. As the dawn of the next day came they saw an island just ahead of them.

b. Everyone helped dumping out grain that filled the hold so the ship would have a shallower draft & get closer to shore.

- c. But as they headed in, the ships ran aground on a reef & stuck fast.
- d. The waves started tearing the ship apart so everyone abandoned ship & made = for shore, swimming or clinging to pieces of wreckage.

15. In this way= all 276 made it safely to shore, just as Paul had foretold.

C. Tired!

1. = Now, imagine what condition these guys are in!

a. They've eaten only one meal in 2 weeks. And what kind of meal could it have been, m= ade in the circumstances it was? It had to be pretty bad.

b. They'd just endured 2 weeks of unrelenting, all-out terror, convinced at any moment they were goners.

c. Then they dive into the tempest-tossed, frigid waters of a storm & battle th= eir way to shore.

d. No one was body-surfing or boogie boarding; whooping it up as they made their = way to the beach.

e. They were *desperate* to reach land & spending the *last of their physical strength to get there*.

f. When they came out of the water, you know many of them *crawled* out on their hands & knees.

g. And as soon as they were beyond the reach of the waves, they fell down & la= id there.

2. = [Story of big waves at Newport]

3. = So I can just imagine what *these guys* were going through.

4. = What made their situation *so much worse* was . . .

- their lack of food,
- the prolonged panic they'd endured,
- the fact that the water they'd just swam through was cold,
- & the storm that had driven them for 2 weeks = is still pouring on them; the wind is still blowing.

5. = At Newport the sun was shining & the water was in the 68.

6. = So – that's the sitch now as we pick up the story at. v. 1 . . .

II. TEXT

A. V. 1

¹Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta.

1. = Because of the storm, they'd had no way to plot their course & had no idea where they were in the Mediterranean.
2. = Once ashore, they discovered they were on Malta, a small island 60 miles south of Sicily.
3. = Like everything else in the Mediterranean, it was controlled by Rome.
4. = From the description Luke gives of their journey & the shipwreck, most scholars believe they landed in what today is called *St. Paul's Bay*.

B. V. 2

²And 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.

1. = There were 2 groups on Malta;
 - 1 - A small colony of wealthy Roman military veterans & their families.
 - 2 - The native population who'd originally settled the island a thousand years before.
2. = A number of natives had become servants to the Romans while the majority continued to live by their own customs.
3. = Luke refers to them by the Greek term – barbaros; from which we get the word barbarian.
 - a. In Greek it simply referred to someone who didn't speak Greek.
 - b. To the Greek ear, other languages sounded like “bar-bar-bar-bar” so they referred to non-Greek speaking people as ‘barbaros.’
4. = These who came to assist those from the shipwreck were the native Maltese.
5. = Most didn't speak Greek but they understood the need to provide assistance for these poor unfortunates crawling up on their beach.

C. Vs. 3-4

³But 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. ⁴So 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.”

1. = I have a question: What’s Paul doing gathering stick for the fire?
 - a. After all, he’s an apostle! He’s an important & famous guy.
 - b. He’s a leader, arguably the greatest Christian leader of his day.
 - c. And he’s just one of 276 from the shipwreck.
 - d. There’s a whole group of natives who’ve come to help them.
 - e. So what’s *Paul* doing gathering firewood?
2. = He’s doing what he’s always done – serving.
 - a. He’d assigned himself no place of special importance.
 - b. He knew he was an apostle as his letters make clear, but he didn’t think being an apostle exempted him from common work.
 - c. He understood Jesus’ teaching that in the Kingdom of God the greatest is the servant of all & made no fuss about doing the humble work of keeping the fire going.
 - d. He wasn’t one of those guys who does a great job teaching *on service* but who never actually does it!
 - e. Though there were plenty of people around, Paul never thought, “I wonder who’s going to add some more wood to this fire.”
 - f. He saw a need, & he moved to meet it.
3. He was exhausted, cold, sore, & hungry like everyone else. But He didn’t use that as an *excuse* for inaction. *Because he identified himself as a servant,* when there was a need, he moved to take care of it.
4. = So, he bent over to pick up some wood for the fire & as he did, a poisonous snake that had come out to warm itself struck.
5. = When he pulled back his hand, there it was hanging from him.
6. = The natives got all excited – seeing it as an act of the gods,

a. A sure sign that though Paul had escaped the sea, he couldn't escape the long reach of justice.

b. It was first century version of Final Destination.

7. = The natives thought Paul had to be some a serious criminal, probably a *murderer*, to have such a string of bad luck = *hound* him like this.

D. Vs. 5-6

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.

1. = You gotta' love this—Paul just shakes the snake off into the fire as though nothing's happened.

a. He had little concern of dying since just a short time before God had sent an angel to tell him he'd make it safely to Rome to stand before the Emperor.

b. So far everything had happened just as the angel foretold, so Paul had every confidence a little snake would be no problem.

c. Besides, Jesus had spoken about just such an event. In Mark 16 He said that as His followers went out preaching the Gospel, one of the miraculous signs that would follow them was that even if they were bitten by poisonous snakes, they would suffer no harm.

d. So from Paul's perspective, this wasn't something to freak out about—it was simply Scripture being fulfilled.

2. = BTW – What happened to Paul here is *precisely* what Jesus was referring to in Mark 16:18.

a. Jesus never meant to suggest the snake-handling that's still practiced in some circles.

b. Some religious groups open up a pen of rattlesnakes, then PROVE their faith by catching them.

c. That is in no way what Jesus meant.

d. He said that it was as His followers were engaged in the mission of making disciples if bitten they'd suffer no harm.

e. Since that's what Paul was doing, when this viper bit him, he was

unaffected.

3. = And the natives, who were convinced he must be a *major sinner*, did a 180 & decided he was a *deity*.

4. = They waited for him to show the signs of snakebite – but they never appeared. So they concluded Paul must be a god.

E. Evaluating

1. = Now, the story goes on to what *else* Paul did on Malta, but I want us to examine the *reaction* of the Maltese to Paul.

2. = They began by thinking him a really bad guy & ended concluding he's a god – all because they were evaluating things by their appearance, by *their own wisdom & experience*.

3. = *Both their conclusions were wrong.*

a. *Paul was neither a murderous criminal nor a deity.*

b. *The snake bite was not justice getting its revenge.*

c. *And Paul's miraculous survival was not due to his being a god.*

4. = *The decisions, though polar opposites, were both in error.*

a. *And they were, because they were made = apart from God's Word.*

b. *They were wide of the mark precisely because they weren't derived from the counsel of the HS.*

5. = *The Maltese drew their conclusions about Paul out of*

- *their own experience,*
- *their own reason,*
- *their own limited perspective on reality.*

a. *They hadn't heard the Gospel yet & knew nothing of Paul's God so they didn't factor Him or His power into their calculations.*

b. *Leaving God out, they could do nothing but come to the wrong conclusion.*

6. = *What was true for the natives gathered round the fire that night on the rain-soaked beach of Malta is true for everyone today.*

7. = *We can judge life & evaluate our circumstances out of our own wisdom & experience, or we can look at them from the perspective of God's Word & the Spirit's counsel.*

a. *If all we bring to the table is our own ideas, our own wisdom & experience, then we'll miss the meaning & the point of it all.*

b. *If we leave God out of the picture, it'll never make sense;*

c. *Things will always be fuzzy, an unclear hodge-podge of random events, & we'll keep drawing the wrong conclusions & making the wrong choices.*

d. *We'll keep making the same mistakes over & over again, baffled why we never learn.*

e. *Without God we're trapped in an endless loop of failure because we're leaving out the key ingredient, the centerpiece around which all of life rotates.*

8. *= This is the central theme of Proverbs.*

a. *The fool is the one who evaluates life & his circumstances without considering God.*

Prov. 28:26 - He who trusts in his own heart is a fool.

V. 1 of both Psalm 14 & 53 say –

The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."

b. *Contrasted with the fool is the wise person who BEGINS with God.*

Proverbs 3:5-6 - Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

9. *= There's the essence of wisdom. There's the key to real success in life – to factor God into the heart & core of everything.*

a. *To look to His Word for perspective on every situation.*

b. *To look to the Spirit's guidance in every circumstance.*

10. *The world is in the mess it is today because it fails to consider God.*

a. *The intellect of man & woman can rise to incredible heights.*

1) *Technology has accomplished amazing things.*

2) *We've harnessed the very power of the atom.*

b. *And while man has accomplished that, because he fails to consult God, he uses that power to make bombs capable of destroying the entire Planet.*

c. We've parsed the genetic code & can splice genes – but because we neglect God, we bioengineer lethal viruses & weaponize them for war.

11. Let's make it more personal.

a. We fall in love & get married, then have problems & think happiness lies somewhere else.

b. We never look to God's Word for perspective & counsel, thinking we know what's best.

c. So we divorce & move on to another marriage, & another after that.

d. We keep making the same mistake until we realize the problem isn't the losers we married; it's us – it's our misdiagnosis of ourselves & our need.

12. It doesn't matter what the issue is, from marriage & family to finances & work – if we only use

- our own wisdom,*
- our own experience,*
- or even that of the so-called experts of this world, like the natives on the beach on Malta that day,*

we'll get it wrong.

13. The only proper way to understand our lives & circumstances is to see them from God's perspective, to evaluate them from the counsel of His Word & Spirit.

14. That's what Paul did. When that serpent bit him, he just held out his hand & said, "Hey, lookie there, a snake." Then shook it off into the fire & continued to do what he'd been doing – faithfully serving God.

III. CONCLUSION

A. How It Began

1. = The reason why the United States is the world's most prosperous nation & has the highest standard of living in the history of the world is because our core institutions of the family, the church, schools, & civil government, were all originally formed by people whose central point of reference was the God of the Bible & the Christian Faith.

2. = Though they weren't all evangelical Christians as we'd define it, their worldview was permeated by & saturated with the Bible & Gospel.

3. = The Republic they founded & which we continue to enjoy the benefits of, was an attempt to instill the counsel of Scripture into the warp & woof of all

society.

4. = 220 years later it seems America has forsaken the God & Bible of the Founders.

5. = America is running on the vapors of an empty tank.

6. = While the rest of this Maltese society turns to the bankrupt wisdom of man to deal with the problems looming on every hand,

7. = We who believe in the God of Paul & share his faith in Jesus must look to Scripture for direction on what to do & how to live.

8. = As our motto here at CCO says – = Let us learn & LIVE God's Word.

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