

Text: Acts 28:1-16
Target audience: All
Topic: God's blessings
Theme: God blesses even when things are not going well.
My purpose for this message: Encourage people to look for God's blessings
Delivered: May 29, 2005 @ KEFC

Blessings Along the Way

Clip from *Bruce Almighty* (complaining that God both neglects him, and persecutes him “Why this, why that?”)

I don't recommend *Bruce Almighty* to learn much about God, prayer, or salvation. But it's not too bad on the subject of humanity. We are a roomful of Jim Carreys. Doesn't it see sometimes like *everything's* going wrong? We're scratching our heads and asking, “God, where are your blessings?”

READ Ps.5:12. In the OT, the “righteous” are not squeaky clean people who have hardly ever sinned, but God's people. Surely God *blesses* them. Not, He might bless them, not, if He thinks about it He will... But, God *surely* blesses the righteous.

In the eye of the storm, spotting blessings can be a challenge because of the fury of the wind and rain. Yet, each breath of air, each friend that stays loyal, the thoughtfulness of a clerk or other motorist, each time your brakes hold, the fact that you still have a job, the comfort of my bed, the health of my children, each bill paid on time, every skill or talent you have, each warm encounter with a family member. These are not accidents; *surely* God blesses the righteous. READ Jas. 1:17.

PRAY.

As we read the text this morning, see how many of God's blessings you can find. READ Acts 28:1-16.

How many did you find? There are at least 5, and perhaps upwards of a dozen. Paul was bound for Rome, to stand trial for his life. It was about 4-5 years later that he was executed there, but Acts 20 suggests he already knew the end was coming. But, on the way to trial, Paul's ship came apart in the surf off Malta, an Island in the Adriatic about the size of 2 Washington D.C.'s. Today Malta's not only a tourist destination, but a financial center and international trade intersection. But in Paul's day, it was not exactly a bustling place with no rescue services. He and 275 others, barely made it to shore. If you'd have asked him after services, “How's it going?” he should have been that person who launches into a tale of woe. Not so. Paul's writings show he was almost *always* able to find God's blessings in the middle of bleak circumstances. “*He has delivered us from...a deadly peril, and he will deliver us*” (2 Cor.1:10).

Not only did God deliver Paul and the rest of the passengers, once on shore, He blessed them in marvelous ways. Let me show you the ones I found and see if they are the same you saw.

1. (2) The 1st blessing was the the islanders' kindness. Likely the castaways couldn't understand the natives. Luke actually calls them in Greek—not islanders but “barbarians”—βαρβαροι. By that, not meaning they were murderous savages, but that their language sounded like “bar, bar, bar...” But neither the linguistic or racial differences kept the Maltese people from a level of kindness (*unusual* kindness) that surprised Luke, who was well-acquainted with the unsurpassed nature of middle eastern hospitality. And then the local Roman governor or official, put them up on his estate for 3 days—presumably all 276 that survived the shipwreck. Kindness. Jewish philosopher Abraham Heschel once said, “When I

was young, I admired clever people. Now that I am old, I admire kind people.” True. This was indeed a blessing from God.

2. (3-6) A 2nd blessing was the snakebite miracle. This is an odd miracle but one of the greatest in the NT. However, some Christians have turned it into a doctrine. In certain Appalachian hollows of Tennessee, North Carolina and Virginia, pastors and church members handle poisonous snakes during services to demonstrate their faith.

They will point to this passage, but the passages these folks consider their red meat are Mk.16:17-18 and Lk.10:19. READ. The Mark passage is especially unconvincing since the best manuscript evidence hints that Mark ended his gospel with chapter 15:8, and that someone copying the book later, added the extra verses. Even if it *was* part of Christ’s words, it does not *prescribe* that people do these things, but *describes* what God might do when His children do so (likely under persecution).

Luke 10:19 has to include Luke 10:18 for proper interpretation: it seems that this is speaking of spiritual opposition. That is, that snakes and scorpions are images of satanic opposition, not necessarily reptiles and insects.

Snakebite can’t kill Paul because God meant to protect him until he reached the end of his race no matter *what*.

3. (7-9) A 3rd blessing was the ability to heal. Paul healed the governor’s father, and then the word got out: he suddenly was swamped with patients. *When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured*. The fact that Paul was destined for trial in Rome, guarded by soldiers, did not mean that God was finished ministering through him. Using your spiritual gifts is one of God’s blessings. Don’t you find that? I’m on cloud nine when I share the gospel with someone, I feel absolutely privileged to teach the things of the Lord—and *get paid for it!* That ministry you have to others of welcoming people to the services, of showing someone to a seat, teaching your SS class, shepherding your CONNECTION group, or praying for people after Sunday’s service, these are God’s blessings. The privilege to be part of the kingdom work.

4. (10) A 4th blessing was provision for the journey. When it was time to go, the locals provided all the supplies they needed for the rest of the way. At the very least they gave them enough food for 276 people for the 80 mile journey to Cicily. No need to go into town and buy: people donated what was needed. I remember a godly, godly man who used to run a Christian camp in Michigan. What a fireball for God. He was a man of great faith who paid more attention to the Spirit’s promptings than to budget planning. And God was always providing what he or the camp needed in ways that were worthy of a book. Listening to his stories of God’s provision and blessing me melt in my chair and worship.

5. (14, 16) And a 5th blessing was a measure of freedom. Julius must have had an incredible heart because when Paul asked if he could spend the week in Puteoli with some Christian brothers, the centurion said “Yes.” Imagine sheriffs transporting a prisoner to the Lancaster County prison, agreeing to the man’s request to spend a week with friends in Willow Street. Not... gonna... happen!

AND, then when he *did* arrive in Rome, he was permitted to rent his own house. He had only a single guard (30) and friends could come and go at will. Blessing! Blessing after blessing, after blessing! Problems? Oh sure, like custody, court trial, and shipwreck; but also blessing, after blessing, after blessing.

Do you see them? Blessings? I mean in *your* life? Have you noticed lately that the Lord *surely* has blessed you and *is* blessing you? What do you say when someone comes up to you after service and asks, "How're you doing?"

Take Israel for example: through stunning miracles, God sprung Israel free after 4 ½ centuries as Egypt's slaves. As they escaped toward the sea, laden with the gold, silver and other goods their masters had given them, God asked them how they were doing. Instead of looking at the blessing of freedom they looked at the pursuing army behind them and the sea in front of them and complained, "If only we'd have stayed in Egypt, we could have lived."

God then parted the sea for them, and killed the pursuing army. A month later after another service, God asked them again, "So, how are you folks doing?" Instead of looking at the blessing of freedom, the blessing of deliverance from an enemy, they looked at their empty baskets and said, "If only we'd have stayed in Egypt, at least we had plenty of food to eat."

God miraculously provided manna as well as quail. A little later at another service God asked the people again, "How are you doing?" Instead of looking at the blessing of the food God had provided, they looked at their dry canteens and complained, "We should have stayed in Egypt; at least there we had plenty of water to drink. We're going to die in of thirst in this desert." See a pattern?

Concl:

When I was a boy we often sang this old hymn by Johnson Oatman Jr. Count your blessings, name them one by one, count your blessings, see what God has done. Do I, do you?

As Marcia lingered by the piano at the party, a woman with cold eyes approached her and asked "Who are you?" By the time Marcia said her name, the woman's eyes had flicked away, scanning the room for someone of more significance. She had already dismissed Marcia. She left and Marcia watched her from time to time, moving about in the crowded room. Apparently there weren't many people of significance there. Her eyes kept roaming.

Sometime later a mutual friend tried to introduce the two again. "Who are you?" the woman asked once more. Marcia didn't answer. And the woman didn't notice.

Perhaps too busy looking for an important blessing to see the greatness of the ones before us. Author Lorna Crozier wrote "Every time you pay attention, you praise." The same is true with us and God.

Blessings we fail to see...

Today I stood at the window and cursed the pouring rain.
Today a desperate farmer prayed for his fields of grain.
My weekend plans are ruined, it almost makes me cry.
While the farmer lifts his arms and blesses the clouded sky.
The alarm went off on Monday and I cursed my work routine.
Next door a laid off mechanic feels the empty pocket of his jeans.
I can't wait for my vacation, some time to take for me.
Next door He doesn't know how he'll meet his family's needs.
I cursed the leaking roof and the grass I need to mow.
A homeless man downtown checks for change in the telephone.
I need a new car; mine is getting pretty old.
He huddles in the doorway seeking shelter from the cold.
With blessings I'm surrounded; the rain, a job, a home.
Though my eyes are often blinded, by the things I think I own.

Author Unknown

