

# Through Many Dangers, Toils and Snares

- Acts 28
- Today is sermon number 61 on the book of Acts. And though we have come to the end of our study of Acts for now, we have certainly not come to the end of the Acts of the Apostles, because that continues even to this day, through people like you and me. That chapter will not be final until the Lord comes back and we see the glory of all that God has been doing since He first created man in His own image. The title of the sermon today, “Through Many Dangers, Toils and Snares,” will be familiar to most of you as the first line of a verse in Amazing Grace. “Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come, Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.” Paul would have loved that hymn and especially that verse. “Dangers, toils and snares?” he might have said. Know all about those! But though I have been beaten with rods, stoned and left for dead, given forty lashes minus one five times, arrested, imprisoned, and now shipwrecked and snake bitten, I consider these light afflictions, and these sufferings are not worthy to be compared to the GLORY that is to be revealed to us. Grace has brought me this far. Grace will lead me home.
- I want to hit the highlights of this chapter briefly under the following three headings: Malta Ministry, Jewish Appeal, and Unchained Evangelism.
- **Malta Ministry**
- When the storm finally passes and the men on the ship swim ashore on an unknown island, they are greeted by friendly natives who have already built a fire for them. Paul immediately goes to work, foraging about in the woods to find a bundle of sticks to add to the fire. Later we find Paul living in Rome at his own expense, which means he was working at his trade even while under house arrest. Besides all the other qualities about Paul that we love, his work ethic is on the list. Nobody was going to outwork him, not because he was proud and competitive, but because he was diligent and disciplined. Momma don’t let you son grow up to be cowboys. No, forget that. Don’t let your sons grow up to be lazy.
- Paul’s hard work provides an opportunity for God when a viper latches onto Paul’s hand as the heat drives it out of the bundle of sticks in his arms. He shakes it off into the fire, no big deal. But the natives believe that he must be a murderer and think, ‘You may have escaped the raging sea, little man, but don’t kid yourself! Our god is called Justice, and you are about to meet him.’ They expected him to fall over dead any minute. The natives turn around, though, and Paul is roasting marshmallows over the fire and whistling Amazing Grace. Then the natives decide he is a god. Isn’t this the same thing that happened in Lystra, just in reverse order? There Paul healed a lame man and the people started worshiping him. 24 hours later, the very same people stone him and leave him for dead.
- The next thing you know, Paul is invited to the chief’s house, and finds out that the chief’s father is sick with fever and dysentery. We know now that he had what’s called Malta fever, which comes from the milk of a Maltese goat. I knew there was a reason I will not drink goat’s milk. The fever usually lasted 4 months, but could persist for 2-3 years! Not this time. Paul prayed, God healed, and then the whole island lined up, everybody who had any kind of disease. As we have seen many times in the study of this book, “God works in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform!
- **Jewish Appeal**
- The ship sailed again after three months on the island, and about a week later, Paul was walking into Rome. I would imagine his heart was in his throat as he finally arrived after 2 and ½ years of trying to get there. Paul had written to the church what was his most comprehensive theological letter, Romans, but this was the first time he had ever stepped foot on Italian soil. Look at verse 15: upon seeing the brothers there, “Paul thanked God and took courage.” The one who so often is found giving courage to others is now on the receiving end.

- What did Paul do next? What's amazing is what he did not do. He did not say to the brothers, "It has been an arduous journey for these two years. I need a rest. The shipwreck alone exhausted me. Give me some months and when I feel up to it, I will let you know." NO! Three days after he arrived in Rome, Paul sent for the Jewish leaders to come and meet with him. Why? The same reason why Paul went first to the synagogues in every town he visited, because of the truth of what he had written in Romans 1:16, "the gospel...is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." He first wanted to make an appeal to his people, and to the people who were the apple of God's eye. In the first century there were around 40,000 Jews in Rome, and at least ten synagogues. Paul sent Aristarchus and Luke out, perhaps, to ask the leaders to come and meet with him. They come, he tells them a very brief version of his arrest and trial and appeal to Caesar. They appoint a day (vs 23) to return and hear him speak. On that day Paul spoke from morning till evening about the kingdom of God **and** tried to convince them that Jesus was the king who was prophesied about from the very beginning, even in the garden. At the end of the day, some believed and some didn't. The Gospel divided on that day, and it still does on this one. Paul quoted to them from Isaiah the prophet because they heard but did not understand and they saw but did not perceive because their hearts had grown dull. Listen! There is appointed a day for each of us as well. We don't have yesterday, and ever will again. And tomorrow is not promised to us. We have today. That's why the Bible says "Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation." (2 Cor. 6:2) I loved Becky's email to the church last week and saved it in a file. Can I quote from part of it? She wrote it after a high school friend of Rudy's died unexpectedly of a massive heart attack and left a wife (Catherine) and a child behind. Becky was writing to encourage us to take time NOW to do what we so often put off. Here's part of what she wrote: "I think sometimes we do wait for that perfect amount of savings to go on a date night, get married, have a baby, tithe, share, give.... Not even related to money, we often wait for perfect timing to do something special, say I love you, apologize, eat dessert.... to tell someone about Jesus. The fact is we are not promised tomorrow and if we live too carefully and cautiously, we are going to miss out on some really great things that GOD has for us. It's not about what's in our bank accounts or homes, what we have or don't have, how old or young we are. It really comes down to relationships. Our relationship with Christ and our relationship with those around us. If I am alive to see my husband, parent, friend, child... take their final breath on this earth, I pray I will be like Catherine. Heart broken -yes, but so very thankful to love and be loved fully -with no regrets! That I wouldn't be longing for one more day to spend on apologies and do overs, but to love and laugh, whether it is a special day like an anniversary or birthday, or it is just a typical Monday with all the normal things that need to get done. Everyday is a gift! I know I am thankful for this day that I get to live and love! I hope you are!"
- I think the devil's favorite word is tomorrow. He would want us all to live like the man in this poem by Edgar Guest, entitled "Tomorrow."
- Tomorrow: He was going to be all that a mortal should be/Tomorrow.  
No one should be kinder or braver than he/Tomorrow.  
A friend who was troubled and weary he knew, Who'd be glad of a lift and who needed it, too;  
On him he would call and see what he could do/Tomorrow.  
Each morning he stacked up the letters he'd write/Tomorrow.  
And thought of the folks he would fill with delight/Tomorrow.  
It was too bad, indeed, he was busy today, And hadn't a minute to stop on his way;  
More time he would have to give others, he'd say/Tomorrow.  
The greatest of workers this man would have been/Tomorrow.  
The world would have known him, had he ever seen/Tomorrow.  
But the fact is he died and he faded from view, And all that he left here when living was through  
Was a mountain of things he intended to do....Tomorrow.
- **Unchained Evangelism**

- We know from the last two verses that Paul lived in Rome for two years. Here are some phrases that mark that out for us.
- “At his own expense.” We’ve already talked about that, but we know that Paul lived like Jesus and modeled for us how to do the same: he lived to serve, not to be served.
- “Welcomed all who came to him.” He couldn’t go to them anymore, since he was under house arrest and attended constantly by a Roman soldier. More on that in a moment. But Paul had said to the Jewish leaders, “The Gentiles will listen!” And they did! For two years they came to hear this man, and only heaven will reveal how many came and heard and were eternally changed. Because Paul was...
- “Proclaiming and teaching.” He proclaimed the kingdom of God, which would have been a theme that most had heard of in first century Rome. But he taught about Jesus, whom most would have not heard of then, or if they had, it would have been as the Jewish leaders said, “a sect that everywhere is spoke against.” (vs 22) It is the same today. There are many who believe in “God” but few who understand who Jesus is and that there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)
- “With all boldness and without hindrance.” These are the last words of the text. The NIV has it wrong, placing this phrase at the beginning of the sentence. John Stott wrote of Paul’s proclamation, “Speech that was candid (no concealment of truth), clear (with no obscurity of expression), and confident (with no fear of consequences).” May God give us that same boldness! His ministry was also without hindrance. Even chained to a Roman soldier. Now it is possible that the same soldier was assigned to Paul the whole two years, but it is much more likely that it was a succession of soldiers, many of whom came to Christ. We know this from Paul’s letter to the Philippian church, which he wrote during this two-year period. **Philippians 1:12-14** We see there also that Paul’s ministry emboldened others who were NOT in prison. So, Paul reached Roman guards with the Gospel and then they were sent as missionaries by the Roman empire all over the known world! That’s why Paul wrote in 2 Timothy that though he was bound as a criminal, “the word of God is not bound!” Paul wrote perhaps his most powerful letters that testify to the glory of Christ while in prison: Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. He also wrote Philemon, after he had met Onesimus the runaway slave (one of the people who came to him), and led him to faith in Jesus.
- As we close, you will notice that Luke does not record Paul’s death. Had Paul been executed at the end of these two years, Luke would have written about it in the final chapter, wouldn’t he? He recorded Stephen’s death and James’. Why would he leave out the most significant martyr of all? Because Paul was not done yet. Paul expected to be released. He said so in Philippians (“I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance” and in Philemon (“prepare a guest room for me.”) And Paul was released and traveled again and even visited some places that he had not been before, like Nicopoli, which is mentioned in Titus. He wrote his final letters after this release, the pastoral epistles, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. Then he was arrested, tried again, and eventually beheaded by Nero. You remember in 2 Timothy, his last letter, he knows the end is near, as he writes, “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.” The word for departure can refer to striking a tent to go on to your permanent dwelling. Or throwing off the lines at the dock and setting sail for the last time.
- So, how do we end this magnificent book? By committing ourselves to being a vital part of Acts 29, the unwritten chapter that is BEING written through the lives of the faithful followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Today is the day. Be in it. Even through many dangers, toils, and snares. Live it. For Jesus’ sake.