

MALTA MATTERS

I. Acts 28:1-11

A. Today's text follows a shipwreck which included the Apostle Paul and Dr. Luke. They had been bound for Rome where Paul, a prisoner, had appealed to Caesar for a new trial. A centurion named Julius is escorting prisoners by ship when they encounter a deadly nor'easter on the Mediterranean Sea. After battling the storm for two weeks, they crash upon the shores of Malta, an island 60 miles south of Sicily. A total of 276 souls, passengers, prisoners, and crew, are all spared.

B. Malta is about 18 miles long and 8 miles wide. It was settled by the ancient Phoenicians who were renowned mariners. Though under Roman rule, the Maltese people still spoke the Phoenician dialect. Malta was originally called *Melita*. *Malta* means "*place of refuge*" and Luke will tell us it lived up to its name. But the Maltese would soon meet the One who would provide refuge for them.

C. This wasn't Paul's first shipwreck. When boasting of his weaknesses in 2 Corinthians 11:24-25 (ESV) Paul reports: "*Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea...*" (Paul wrote that letter to the church in Corinth well before this fourth shipwreck! He knows the drill!)

D. Paul's been on three missionary journeys already. Most scholars believe there'd be a fourth, following his release from prison in Rome. Tradition says he went as far as Spain. I believe this little nautical detour to Malta was just as sovereignly ordained as those other missionary journeys and we're about to read why.

E. Acts 28:1-11 (ESV) Luke provides a remarkable post-shipwreck account...

1) V1-2: *1 After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta. 2 The native people (Gk: Barbaroi: barbarians, rustics) showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold. (It's late October or early November.)*

2) V3-4: *3 When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. 4 When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live." (A reference to the goddess of justice, Dike, a.k.a. Justitia. Blindfolded goddess holding the scales...)*

3) V5-6: *5 He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. 6 They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god. (When Paul & Barnabas healed a man crippled from birth in Lystra, the people deemed them gods. Then the Jews stirred up the crowd and they stoned Paul. Public opinion can swing rapidly, one way or another. Stay strong and steady come what may!)*

4) V7-8a: *7 Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, named Publius, (The island governor.) who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days. 8 It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. (This is believed to have been a fever caused by brucella bacteria found in unpasteurized goat milk. It later became known as Malta Fever. In could last months, even years!)*

5) V8b-9: *And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him, healed him. 9 And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured. (No doubt the healings came to affirm the Gospel. God put life and power on His Word and affirmed it by making the sick, well. Sozo is the word that means being made well, made whole, saved! Sozo was certainly in action here!)*

6) V10-11: *10 They also honored us greatly, (Lit: "They honored us with many honors.") and when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed. 11 After three months we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead. (Remember Centurion Julius still had to deliver his prisoners to Rome but at the same time he and his men, along with all their prisoners and all the Maltese islanders, are firsthand witnesses to this move of God! Note also, had the Maltese people rejected Paul and Luke and their Gospel, it's doubtful they'd have sent them away so hospitably. Malta experienced a three month great awakening!)*

F. Here's some takeaways for you to ruminate on, to prayerfully ponder:

1) Proverbs 16:1 (NASB) says: "*The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.*" Proverbs 16:9 (NASB) echoes: "*The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps.*" You can

make plans but God calls the shots. Here's the classic Apostle Paul: When marooned on an Island, make the best of it. When you're chained up in prison, ask for a pen & paper. If they throw you out of this town, go to the next town, or to the next one. If you can't see to write, do so with bigger letters or hire a scribe. Keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking. Keep on keepin' on! To Paul, this was the normal Christian life!

2) Sometimes God puts a plan in our hearts and directs it to fruition. Other times He tosses a wrench into the gears, takes us by complete surprise by altering our course. Mark recently referenced the Asbury Revival, how a student at a Tuesday morning chapel service, on February 3, 1970, stood up and began confessing his sins. An extraordinary revival broke out which rippled like a tsunami across our nation and around the world. None of the college officials planned that event. But God did!

3) God could have sent other apostles or evangelists to Malta. But he chose Paul. And He sent along Luke to take copious notes. Think about it: Paul & Luke were like a spiritual/medical missionary team! A storm could not stop them. The Jews could not stop them. Rome could not stop them. Satan could not stop them. God never looked at this event as a Plan B detour. God loved the people of Malta and wanted them adopted into His Family and made it so. He wants the same for you!

4) Jesus' words in **Matthew 10:40-41** (AMP) seem particularly fitting: **40** *He who receives and welcomes you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.* **41** *He who receives and welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous (honorable) man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward.* **(This looks to be the case with the people of Malta--they welcomed the Brothers with open hearts and generous hospitality. In a sermon by John MacArthur titled, "The Last Lap" delivered in 1975, he ruminates on these same events: "And tradition also tells us that the first pastor of the Maltese Christians was Publius. And very likely if he had a house that could handle 276 guests, that's probably where the church began too. And even though it doesn't say, we can be fairly confident the church was founded then and agreeing with tradition that Publius may well have been the first pastor and the church could have possibly even met in his house. Someday just to be sure, we'll check out the Lamb's Book of Life when we get there and we'll see a list of Maltese names and at the top will be Publius and maybe following it will be names like Julius, a Roman centurion, and a few other people from a certain ship that had a wreck on the coast of Malta."**

G. The Good News of Jesus Christ matters. Living between the inauguration of His Kingdom and it's full consummation, Christ has commissioned us to preach the Gospel and make disciples of all nations. That includes those from every nation, tribe, and tongue. From Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and the utter most parts of the earth. That includes you! That includes your loved ones! That includes those in your respective spheres of life and influence. And that includes many who reside off the beaten path or those whom you least expect! Between Jerusalem and Rome there was an island targeted by God that bore the name of *Malta*. Between here and New Jerusalem, many more *Maltas* await the Message of Jesus--His undeserved love and sacrifice. May you receive it if you haven't and then may you take it wherever you go!

* Close with Prayer...

[Scriptures, Videos, & Bonus Stuff](#)

[Acts 28:1-11 \(ESV\)](#)

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[2 Corinthians 11:24-25 \(ESV\)](#)

24 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. **25** Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea

[Matthew 10:40-41 \(AMP\)](#)

40 He who receives and welcomes you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. **41** He who receives and welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous (honorable) man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward.

[Sermon Excerpt by John MacArthur](#)

"And tradition also tells us that the first pastor of the Maltese Christians was Publius. And very likely if he had a house that could handle 276 guests that's probably where the church began too. And even though it doesn't say, we can be fairly confident the church was founded then and agreeing with tradition that Publius may well have been the first pastor and the church could have possibly even met in his house. Someday just to be sure, we'll check out the Lamb's Book of Life when we get there and we'll see a list of Maltese names and at the top will be Publius and maybe following it will be names like Julius, a Roman centurion and a few other people from a certain ship that had a wreck on the coast of Malta."

- John MacArthur, Grace to You Sermon Excerpt from "*The Last Lap*," January 19, 1975. To read entire sermon, go to: <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/1801/the-last-lap>

[Film Clips & Article Links](#)

Paul's Shipwreck - BASE Institute

http://www.baseinstitute.org/pages/pauls_shipwreck/20

Among the Barbarians (Acts 28:1-16) - Frank E. Allen © 1931

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=O%2bzDJ50y%2fFY%3d&tabid=162&mid=534>

Calvin's Commentary of the Bible - Acts 28 - John Calvin

<https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/cal/acts-28.html>

Safe Beneath His Sovereign God - Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

Article by Dane Ortlund - Desiring God

https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/safe-beneath-his-sovereign-god?utm_campaign=Weekly%20Email&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=65117624&hsenc=p2ANqtz-8mWZavr_GNX6hUbpJ7cMtyxsp3iEDNkGitnuH-3uK6FcKtWjDzmuixeKgNsnaCPMMD346KbGx8eHPMdkTGnsXxy57QwG2ORpiD49CkPT-cmPH-axs&hsmi=65117624

[Bonus Stuff](#)

[Acts 27:1-44 \(ESV\)](#)

1 And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort named Julius. **2** And embarking in a ship of Adramyttium, which was about to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica. **3** The next day we put in at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for. **4** And putting out to sea from there we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were against us. **5** And when we had sailed across the open sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia. **6** There the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy and put us on board. **7** We sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, and as the wind did not allow us to go farther, we sailed under the lee of Crete off Salmone. **8** Coasting along it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea. **9** Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, **10** saying, "Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives." **11** But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said. **12** And because the harbor was not suitable to spend the winter in, the majority decided to put out to sea from there, on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing both southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there. **13** Now when the south wind blew gently, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close to the shore. **14** But soon a tempestuous wind, called the northeaster, struck down from the land. **15** And when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along. **16** Running under the lee of a small island called Cauda, we managed with difficulty to secure the ship's boat. **17** After hoisting it up, they used supports to undergird the ship. Then, fearing that they would run aground on the Syrtis, they lowered the gear, and thus they were driven along. **18** Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo. **19** And on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. **20** When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned. **21** Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among

them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. **22** Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. **23** For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, **24** and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.' **25** So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. **26** But we must run aground on some island." **27** When the fourteenth night had come, as we were being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. **28** So they took a sounding and found twenty fathoms. A little farther on they took a sounding again and found fifteen fathoms. **29** And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come. **30** And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, and had lowered the ship's boat into the sea under pretense of laying out anchors from the bow, **31** Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved." **32** Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it go. **33** As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing. **34** Therefore I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you." **35** And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat. **36** Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves. **37** (We were in all 276 persons in the ship.) **38** And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea. **39** Now when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, on which they planned if possible to run the ship ashore. **40** So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the ropes that tied the rudders. Then hoisting the foresail to the wind they made for the beach. **41** But striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by the surf. **42** The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape. **43** But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, **44** and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land.

2 Corinthians 11:16-33 (ESV)

16 I repeat, let no one think me foolish. But even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. **17** What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I say not as the Lord would but as a fool. **18** Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast. **19** For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves! **20** For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face. **21** To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that! But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. **22** Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. **23** Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. **24** Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. **25** Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; **26** on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; **27** in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. **28** And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. **29** Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? **30** If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. **31** The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. **32** At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, **33** but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.

Jonah 1:1-17 (ESV)

1 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, **2** "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before Me." **3** But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD. **4** But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. **5** Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. **6** So the captain came and said to him, "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish." **7** And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. **8** Then they said to him, "Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?" **9** And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." **10** Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, "What is this that you have done!" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. **11** Then they said to him, "What

shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. **12** He said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you." **13** Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. **14** Therefore they called out to the LORD, "O LORD, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you." **15** So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. **16** Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows. **17** And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Quote by James H. Aughey

"God brings men into deep waters not to drown them, but to cleanse them."

Quote by Tony Evans

God has a plan for your life and a purpose for your existence. The reason you weren't taken to heaven the moment after you became a Christian is because of that purpose on earth He desires you to fulfill. It's not just to get a job, collect a paycheck, pay bills, or to have fun on the weekend. There is a God-designed stamp on your life. But He rarely ever takes us to that destiny apart from detours. He seldom takes us from point A to point B without causing us to make stops at P, X, and Q along the way. As such, we almost never know which letter He's going to pull out of the hat next!

Quote by Sarah Koontz (Grounded & Surrounded)

"Every single time God has thrown a detour sign on my path, He has faithfully guided me through to the destination. Looking back, I am eternally grateful for the unexpected detours because they have taught me the value of resilience, faithfulness, and patience."

The Perilous Voyage. Almost A Tragedy.

From *The Story of Buckeye Lake* by Joseph Simpson

This old "Reservoir" has a record in the way of returning souls to their Maker. Singly, doubly, and families, have gone to their doom beneath its treacherous waves. And suicides and deaths by lightning have occurred here. So, taking it all in all, this old pond has much to answer for.

Over forty-five years ago—during the war—a party of four, consisting of a man and wife and child, with a visiting lady, arrived at Hiram Laughrey's (now Rosebraugh's) from Newark. Securing a boat and fishing outfit, they crossed over to the opposite side. After applying their lines for some hours with fair success, and while in the midst of their enjoyment, a dark cloud began slowly rising in the west, indicating the approach of a storm. They thought it wise to get back as soon as possible, so they pulled away as the wind began to blow. Before reaching half the distance across the threatening waves, with their whitecaps, began rolling, and it was certain that a struggle was at hand.

The dark cloud floated down with a gale of wind, following which it gradually increased until it was enough to dishearten the most courageous sailor. At times the boat would seem to be lifted out of the water, and then as suddenly drop back again with the water splashing over and drenching the occupants. But for the fact that the boat was of ordinary build—flat bottomed—their lives would have been in the greatest jeopardy. It was safe compared with the round bottomed narrow built skiffs of today, that could not have gone through such a storm without the loss of every life on board.

There was no thunder nor rain, but how it did blow! The man aboard got busy, for it was quite apparent that the safety of the party depended entirely upon his strength and management, and he saw that he had to apply his best efforts. He cheered and cautioned his companions to keep heart and hold fast if they valued their lives. To keep the boat trim and in the right direction was his task. To prevent drifting and swamping he soon discovered that his left oar only could be used to meet the force of the elements that beat upon the other side of the boat, and to that end he applied his strength. As each succeeding wave struck them they were drenched and blinded by the flying foam and spray, the boat receiving its share of water, which was soon over shoe-top. In fact, with the bow of the boat slanting windward and held in that position by the oarsman with his good single oar, he soon discovered that the waves and winds assisted in driving the boat across.

The mother looked the picture of despair in her twofold efforts to save her baby boy and hold her seat. For one so young the child seemed fairly conscious of the danger which beset them. He stood manfully between his mother's knees, grasping with his wet chubby hands her now thoroughly soaked skirts—mute and sobbing at this supposed undue punishment.

What of the visiting lady? With a broad steering paddle in hand, never a thought entered her head but her services would be again needed in navigating their frail bark back to Laughrey's landing, the place they had so peacefully left in the morning.

Planting herself familiarly in the stern seat she smiled as she proudly dipped her feathered short handled steering device in the then placid but promising waters—at the same time handing out an assuring nod to the oarsman that she was ready for the return trip. The start was made, and upon arriving in mid-stream the tempest had become terrific, and to maintain her position she did not hesitate for a moment to discard to the four winds and waters her dependable, faithful short handled oar as useless during such an occasion, and amid the roar of the elements the voice of the oarsman could scarcely be heard as he vehemently urged the visiting lady to hold fast, as she in despair and with distressed thoughts went up and down and sideways.

The waves with fury followed one another with continued drenchings, the boat filling more and more. Sometimes it would rear up, almost sliding its occupants off their seats, and then drop back with a “smack as it struck the water again. The man at the oar persisted in the work of deliverance. The stimulus of life or death urged him to his utmost. With excellent judgment and the hardest work he finally got the skiff under control, meeting the waves as they struck, and with his positive, steady stroke he felt that they were safe and would eventually reach the blessed shore. And when the shore was reached his powers were about gone. He lingered in his seat for a short time, tremulous and in a state of exhaustion. They were all so worn that they needed help and support in getting out of the boat, which was almost half full of water. A number of persons on shore had witnessed the struggle, one of who was Mr. Laughrey, who, with comforting words praised them for the game fight they had put up. In answer to Hiram, with a half smile and a bit of humor that he had not deserted him, the rover quoted the old adage “He that is born to be hanged will never be drowned.”

They did not tarry long but entered their own conveyance and were soon hurried homeward, happy in the thought and congratulating themselves that they were still alive. A clear sky and the warm sun followed the storm, modifying their discomfort from their wet clothing.

They are all alive and in good health to this day. In the intervening years the visiting lady has made several round trips across the Atlantic, one of which occurred recently, and it is safe to say that she far prefers an ocean voyage to the memorable trip she endured while crossing Buckeye Lake.

- Excerpt from *The Story of Buckeye Lake* by Joseph Simpson, The Hann & Adair Printing Company, Columbus, Ohio © 1912 p.p. 89-93.