

Bi134 Acts

Lesson Bi134-43 Miraculous Ministry on Malta

Jesus *did not* command us to go into all the world and work miracles. He rather told us to go and preach the gospel. Nevertheless, he did promise that God would confirm the proclamation of his Word with ‘signs following.’ In today’s story, God did just that. On the island of Malta, he used Paul to work miracles, which opened the people’s hearts to the good news.

The storm drove Paul’s ship onto a sandbar where it stuck fast. The violent wind and waves then began battering the hapless ship into pieces. In desperation, everyone aboard jumped into the roiling sea and made for the shore. Those who could swam for their lives. The rest desperately clung to planks and floating debris and paddled their way to land. By God’s grace, they all made it safely to shore.

Because it was wintertime and cold, everyone stood shivering on the beach. Seeing their plight, the kindly islanders built a huge bonfire. They invited the men to gather around the fire to warm themselves. The survivors soon discovered that they had crashed on the small island of Malta, about 160 kilometers (100 miles) south of Italy.

The fire began to wane, so Paul pitched in and helped gather brushwood. As he was placing some sticks on the fire, a poisonous snake appeared from under a log. It struck Paul, sinking its fangs deep into his hand. Paul jerked back, but the snake held on. When the locals saw the serpent dangling from his hand, they exclaimed, “This man must be a murderer. He may have escaped the sea; nevertheless, the gods are seeing that he gets justice.” They watched him, expecting him to drop dead at any moment. However, when Paul shook the snake into the fire and suffered no ill effects, they changed their minds. They began to whisper among themselves, “He must be a god!”

A man named Publius was the chief magistrate of the island. His estate was near where the ship had wrecked. He was a generous man and invited Paul and his companions to stay with him in his home. They remained with him for three days. While there, Paul found out that Publius’ elderly father was suffering with dysentery and a raging fever. So, he went into the old man’s room, laid his hands on him, and asked God to heal him. Miraculously, the man was healed.

Word of the miracle spread fast, and soon everyone on the island knew about it. They brought their sick friends and family members to Paul, and God healed them all. Because of this, the people showered Paul and his companions with honors. Then, when it was time three months later for them to leave for Rome, the people gave them everything they would need for the trip. The islanders then bid them farewell and sent them on their way (Acts 28:1-10).

Although Luke does not state that Paul preached the gospel on the island of Malta, we can be assured that he did. This is because we know that it was Paul’s common practice to proclaim Christ everywhere he went. Also, from church history we learn that Paul and his colleagues planted a thriving church on the island of Malta. In fact, Malta became the first ever

Christian nation. We also learn from history that Publius, the chief magistrate of the island, eventually became a leader in the church. He was an ardent proclaimer of Christ. He was martyred by the Roman Emperor Hadrian in A.D. 125.

From Paul's ministry on the island of Malta, we learn three important ministry lessons concerning how we may advance the gospel into new areas.

First, we learn that when we go into new areas to spread the good news, we should look for opportunities to meet people's needs. This is what Paul did. Once he discovered that Publius' father was ill, he immediately went to him and prayed for him. This act of mercy opened the door to further ministry throughout the island. It also opened the hearts of the people to receive the gospel.

Today, we can do the same as we go out to share the good news with others. Like Paul, we should be aware of people's needs, both physical and spiritual. Then, as the Spirit directs us, we should trust the Lord to anoint us to minister to those needs. Once people see our genuine concern for them, they will more likely receive us. They will also be more likely to open their hearts to hear the good news.

We learn a second lesson from the story of Paul's ministry in Malta. When we go to a new place to preach the gospel, we should seek to understand the people's worldview. Their worldview is the unique way they look at the world and interpret the meaning of events. For instance, the Maltese people saw the snake attach itself to Paul's hand. So they assumed that their goddess, Justice, was punishing him for being a murderer. Then, when Paul shook the snake off and suffered no harm, they changed their minds. They thought that Paul was a god. They were interpreting these events out of their own worldview.

Paul, however, had a biblical worldview. He knew that there is only one true God and that he has revealed himself in Scripture. Paul showed the Maltese the truth by preaching Christ to them and by performing miracles in his name.

Today, when we go to new places to preach the gospel, we should be like Paul. We should be aware of, and sensitive to, the people's worldview. However, like Paul, we must never compromise the gospel to accommodate the people's beliefs. Rather, we must lovingly and patiently teach the truth about God as revealed in the Bible.

A third lesson is that we can trust the Lord to confirm the preached word with miraculous signs. On Malta, Paul prayed with many sick people and the Lord healed them. This was in accordance with Jesus' Great Commission. In it he commanded us, saying, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." Then he promised, "And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well" (Mark 16:15-18). If we will obey Christ's command to go and preach the gospel, we can then claim his promise to perform miracles to confirm the Word.

This lesson is **important** because we learn three ministry principles that we can use as we seek to advance the gospel into new areas.

The **main truths** we learn from this lesson are that, when taking the gospel to new areas, we should look for ways to meet people's needs. We should seek to understand the people's worldview. And, we should trust the Lord to confirm his Word with miraculous signs.

Let's **review** some important truths we have learned from this lesson.

1. What happened to Paul when he was tending a fire on the island of Malta?
A. [PAUSE] If you answered that a poisonous snake came out of the wood and attached itself to his hand, you answered correctly.
2. How did the people respond when they saw the serpent hanging from Paul's hand?
A. [PAUSE] If you answered that they said that their goddess, Justice, was punishing him for being a murderer, you are correct.
3. What did the same people say when Paul shook the snake from his hand unharmed?
A. [PAUSE] If you answered, "The people said Paul was a god," you are right.
4. What three ministry lessons did we learn from this lesson concerning how to advance the gospel into new areas?
A. [PAUSE] If you answered, "In new areas we should look for opportunities to meet people's needs, we should seek to understand the people's worldview, and we should trust the Lord to confirm his word with miraculous signs," you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to re-listen to it until you can tell the story of Paul's ministry on the island of Malta to others. You should also be able to discuss with them the three ministry lessons learned from this lesson. Then, gather a group of church leaders together and discuss how you may apply these lessons to an upcoming outreach event.