

GOD'S SALVATION

Acts 28:1-31

Key Verse: 28:28

*“Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles,
and they will listen!”*

I sincerely thank God for allowing us to complete our study of Acts today. We began with the 1st study on the 28th of March 2022. Today, on the 29th of January 2023, we conclude with study 30. Thinking back on all that we have learned, what would you say was Luke’s main purpose for writing the book of Acts? We find the answer in today’s key verse. Luke wrote the book of Acts to show how *God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles*. Of course, in the beginning of Acts, we saw how God’s salvation was sent first to the Jews in Jerusalem. Then, after the persecutions broke out, it also spread to the Jews in Judea and Samaria. But it did not stop there. After Paul’s conversion, God’s salvation was also sent to Gentiles.....first in Asia Minor, then in Macedonia and Greece.....and finally in today’s passage, God’s salvation reached Rome..... the capital.....or shall we say the very heart.....of the Gentile world.

The question is, what is: ‘God’s salvation?’ It relates to God’s forgiveness of our sins, right? But actually, when we think back to last week’s passage, on how God saved Paul and his fellow travellers from the storm, we can begin to understand that God’s salvation is deeper than merely forgiveness of sins. God’s salvation brings undeserved deliverance and transformation. The storm was too powerful and the Alexandrian ship too small. So the sailors lost all hope of being saved! But then, God saved them! Despite the hurricane like winds and battering waves, God brought all 276 men safely to dry land (look at verse 1) on an island called Malta. However, the men were cold, wet and in need of shelter. What made things worse was the fact that it was still raining and cold. But look at verse 2. “The islanders showed them..... unusual kindness.....Now there is kindness and then there is unusual kindness. Kindness is generally when someone is friendly and generous to you when you deserve it. Right? This is human kindness. Unusual kindness, on the other hand, is when someone is kind and generous to you when you do not deserve it! This is God’s kindness. It was with this kindness.....God’s kindness..... that the islanders built a warm fire and welcomed all 276 undeserving travellers to their homes. **This is a perfect illustration of God’s salvation. Like these men caught up in the storm on the Mediterranean Sea, so people from all nations are naturally caught up in a sea of sin. Fearfully locked up and hopelessly drifting through life..... with death constantly threatening...to sweep their weary lives away. But God wants to show them kindness. He wants to save them from**

their sin and warmly welcome them into His Kingdom..... so they can live a new life with God's love and peace in their hearts. This is what is meant by God's salvation. It surely is the greatest gift God has sent to the nations. I pray that through today's message, we will learn more about God who has sent us His wonderful salvation. Amen!

Let's look at verses 3-6. On the island and while everyone was sitting around the warm fire, Paul gathered a pile of brushwood to put on the fire. But unknowingly, he picked up a small viper with the wood. Then, driven out by the heat, the viper drove its venomous fangs into Paul's hand. We all know that one bite from a viper is fatal to a human being..... But Paul simply shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. It was a miracle, right!? Humanly speaking, Paul was to swell up and suffer a slow death.....or alternatively suddenly fall dead. (6) But even after a long time nothing unusual happen to Paul. But why would God keep Paul from harm in this way? It was because, God wanted His salvation to come to the islanders living on Malta. (Mark 16:18; Luke 10:19)

Look again at verse 4. (Read) Here we can see that the islanders had a wrong view of God. Somehow they knew that God would punish people for doing evil. Yet, they never heard about His salvation. As a result, they always lived in fear....that what happened to Paul would one day also happen to them. But this is not who God is. Yes, God is holy and righteous. Therefore, He must and will judge people for all the evil they do. But at the same God is merciful and kind to undeserving sinners. Instead of judging sinners, God wants to forgive them. Instead of taking their lives, God wants to give them eternal life. Instead of being harsh on sinners, God wants to be kind to them. This was perfectly illustrated to the islanders through what happened to Paul. After being bitten by the snake, Paul was supposed to die. Yet, astonishingly he lived! In this way, God's salvation is perfectly illustrated, as being life giving in nature!

Look at verse 7-9. Publius, the chief official of the island either heard or saw for himself what happened to Paul. So he welcomed Paul to his home and showed him generous hospitality for three days. During this time, Paul learned that Publius' father was sick in bed, suffering terribly from fever and dysentery. (Do you know what dysentery is? It is an infection of the intestines that causes diarrhoea containing blood or mucus.) It was a horrible condition that in those days lasted from four months up to three years. I don't think we can ever imagine how terribly Publius' father must have suffered. The stench.....the pain.....the headaches.....he must have felt day after day.....until he lost all hope of being healed. But

then (look at verse 8b) Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him. Then, God healed Publius' sick father. His fever disappeared.....the pain in his stomach replaced by a strong appetite for food. Then he got up out of bed.....and walked around for the first time in many months. When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island also came to Paul. Like Publius' father, God cured them also! Suddenly, there was not a single sick person on the island; lying in pain or suffering in despair. But only healthy and strong people, living joyfully. In this way, God's salvation is again perfectly illustrated, as being transforming in nature!

Through these two miracles God performed on the island of Malta, we can see that people's greatest need.....is not education, or financial security.....No. Their greatest need is God's salvation. People are all infected by sin. That is why, just like Publius' father, people are spiritually powerless.....even helpless.....as their hearts and minds are filled with so much pain and suffering. So their lives become meaningless.....and full of despair. Yet, no matter what they do, they cannot cure themselves of sin. But God's salvation can! They also cannot transform their lives. But God's salvation can! This is why, man's greatest need is God's salvation. The good news is, that God's salvation has not only been sent to sick people on the island of Malta. But to all the spiritually sick people in the world!

Let's look at verses 11-14. (Read) Paul first mentioned Rome after seeing God's great work in Ephesus. At the time he said: *'After I have been in Jerusalem,' 'I **must** visit Rome also.'* (Acts 19:21) As we know well, Paul was, however, arrested in Jerusalem. But in Acts 23:11, the Risen Christ stood beside him and said, *"Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you **must** also testify in Rome."* Two years later, in the terrible storm, the Lord's angel said to Paul, *"Do not be afraid Paul. You **must** stand trial before Caesar..."* (Ac 27:24). At last, after about two and a half years.....in which God intervened several times in his lifePaul came to Rome. The question is, why did God so strongly insist that Paul **must** testify in Rome? To answer this question, we have to think back for a moment, to the beginning of Acts. To which people was God's salvation first proclaimed? To the Jews or the Gentiles? It was to the Jews, right? So in which city was God's salvation first proclaimed? Yes, in Jerusalem, because Jerusalem was the capital city of the Jews!

However, God's salvation is not only for Jews, but also for the Gentiles. So just as the Jews heard God's salvation proclaimed in their capital city Jerusalem, so God's salvation also **had** be proclaimed in the capital city of the Gentile world. Do you know which city this was? Yes, it was Rome! That is why God went out of His way to ensure that Paul safely came to Rome.

For God firmly and absolutely decided to send His salvation also to all the Gentiles nations..... One commentator suggested that an alternative title for the book of Acts might be: **'The Road to Rome.'** For it was Luke's work main concern to show that God's salvation had been sent to the Gentiles.

Why is this hugely significant..... especially for you and me who lives here in South Africa in the year 2023? It is because, you and I are Gentiles. So the fact that Paul proclaimed God's salvation in Rome, the capital city of the Gentiles, assures us that God's salvation has also been sent to you and me.....And not only to us but also to the vast majority of people living with us in this country.....in this continent and in the world! Yes, God's salvation has been sent to all nations!!.....For God wants to give life to sin-sick people and transform their lives – just like he did with the people living on Malta! Yes, He **wants to show them kindness by forgiving their sins and warmly welcoming them into His Kingdom.**

The question is, how can people receive God's salvation? Yes, they need to hear the gospel message and, with God's help, believe it to be true. How, then, can they hear the gospel? Yes, God's children, including you and me, must tell them. But this is not easy, right. Mainly because we don't know what to say. Yet, we can learn from Paul, exactly what to say and how to say it.

Look at verse 16. When Paul got to Rome, he was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him. So three days later, Paul called together the local Jewish leaders. (17) To test the waters and see if they will listen to him. (18-22) The meeting went well. So they arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. (23a) Let's see how Paul shared the gospel with them. Look at verse 23b. Firstly, Paul explained and declared to them the kingdom of God. But how do you explain this to someone. Well, we need to explain that the kingdom of God is where God is King. This refers to the hearts of men. Without the kingdom of God, men are ruled by sin and death. They are slaves of the devil. Just like the islanders on Malta. But whoever willingly accepts Jesus as the King sent by God, can receive the kingdom of God in his or her heart. Then all the power of sin and death is driven out; and God can rule with peace and love.

Now generally, when people hear this, the first question that comes to mind is: is Jesus really the King sent by God? It was no different with the Jews. That is why, secondly, Paul also tried to convince them from Scripture that Jesus is the Christ, sent by God. Then how did the Jews respond. Look at verses 24 and 25a. Some were convinced by what he said, but others would

not believe. They disagreed among themselves and began to leave. How did Paul handle this? Paul understood the rejection of the Jews on the basis of God's word (25-28). It was the fulfillment of prophecy. More than this, it was confirmation that God's salvation was being sent to the Gentiles. Look at verse 28. Can we please read today's key verse together? "Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!" Here Paul made the prophetic declaration that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles. Of great encouragement, is the last phrase.....unlike the Jews.....Paul declared that the Gentiles will listen! This was exactly what happened for two whole years, while Paul stayed in his own rented house in Rome. God sent him many Roman bible student, one after another, who came to see him. And Paul welcomed them all. Then just as he did with the Jews, Paul preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ. Did they listen? You bet they did. One by one, Roman citizens and soldiers received the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in the kingdom of God. So much so that in the next three hundred years, through innumerable unnamed Christians, God turned the Roman Empire into Christendom. Then in 313 A.D. the Emperor Constantine declared Christianity to be the national religion. This was a miracle. The good news is that for the last two sound years, God's salvation continued to deliver and transform people's lives. And it will continue to do so until the Lord Jesus returns.

In conclusion

These days it seems as if university students need many things. They need a place to stay. They need money for registration and for textbooks. Ultimately, they need to graduate and find a job. Indeed, all of these are necessary. However, there is one thing they need the most. God's salvation! For outwardly, young university students look happy and at peace. They even look adventurous. But the truth is, without God's salvation, they suffer terribly with sin. Sin infected their inner being, just like Publius father's intestines were infected by dysentery.

But it does not have to be this way! Because God's salvation has been sent to them. To deliver them from their sin...to heal their sin-sickness...and to transform their lives with the kingdom of God. Then who will witness to these students? Most of us, if not all, have already received God's salvation. We have experienced its life giving power and transforming power. Therefore, we are the ideal candidates to witness to students. God promised us that they will listen. And that He will welcome them with open arms.

Therefore, as we stand on the verge of a new academic year, lets earnestly pray for students to be transformed by God's salvation. In this way, may God's salvation work that He began with Paul in Rome, continue through our ministry. Amen.

