

Shake it Off Acts 27 - 28:5

By M. John Cava

Paul, the Apostle, had been on a several year assignment from the Lord to get to Rome via Jerusalem. Now, he experiences a fourth shipwreck on a strange island. Cold and soaked from the rain, yet always trying to serve, he gathers a bundle of sticks so the group can warm themselves by the fire. What! A viper just latches on to his hand from the flames. "Get off you villain," he says as he **shakes off** the snake into the fire and goes about his work amazingly unharmed. Luke and Aristarchus who were with him chuckle. This is just another unpredictable and crazy happening traveling with Paul. God is faithful.

Looking back, through Macedonia and Asia they were never alone, but constantly interacting with Christ's followers from elders and communities to prophets and evangelists. Paul had to navigate through the many spiritual warnings of people that sensed a vague prophetic picture of a difficult future. Even the prophet, Agabus, predicted chains. They all had a partial picture with very imperfect conclusions; mostly saying, "Don't go!" Now, after more than two years jail time in Jerusalem and Caesarea (that included a few great moments of testimony to government officials) Paul and team had sovereignly moved on. They were living moment by moment in the journey, not knowing what was ahead. What about Rome? Jesus said he would testify there (Acts 23:11). Stay the course. There is more ahead.

Good brothers and sisters had déjà vu pieces of trials ahead, but only God had the whole view. Paul trusted God. He consistently overcame the enemy and the opinions of men. Because Paul knew to **shake off** the last backlash of this stormy trip (the poisonous viper), the door opened to heal the Maltese islanders and bring a testimony of Christ to the people for several months. What a strange but wonderful series of events?

Jumping to the Present:

This past year, 2020, has proven to be one of the most tumultuous years for the American church in several decades. The world morphed under pestilence, politics and shutdowns. The prophetic voices were challenged by dreams and visions, conflicting intelligence and then human happenings. It deeply affected the Body of Christ. Expectations did not happen. Some in the prophetic community say mistakes were made. There does not seem to be a clear end to the matter in 2021. Many remain shaken and confused.

It is truly difficult to discern truth looking through the lens of media articles, people's voices and Information-wars. The Church is divided in its allegiances. ***We can know one thing for sure. Jesus is the living embodiment of truth, the Spirit guides us to Him and the Bible is right.*** What do we do when it's hard to

understand what's happening, and forces around us don't help? "**Shake it off!** Go forward with God" or else you will miss the next opportunity.

What can we learn from these Biblical accounts? Abraham tried to fulfill God's word to himself by having Ishmael. It was a mistake that God worked with. He still had hope without understanding and persevered. In time, Abraham and Sarah gave birth to Isaac, the promised heir, – a full 25 years in waiting. He learned to just believe God (Genesis 21; Romans 4).

David began fighting the wrong battles and lost his troop's wives and children. He regained his senses, sought God and recovered all (1 Samuel 30). Why? He learned to **shake it off**.

Paul's third missionary trip followed a strange pathway from Greece to Jerusalem to Malta to Rome. There were trials, good and bad advice, captures and deliverances sometimes with prophetic warnings and sometimes no warnings. He also had a corrupt government and religious system against him. Circumstances were out of his control. **In all this, he did not let what he did not know hinder what he did know. God called him to preach the gospel of Christ and bring the message of light and liberty to all.**

What do you think the modern church would have said to Paul in the midst of the Mediterranean storm?

"Hey Paul, why don't you rebuke the wind and waves, if you are really spiritual?"

"You must be a Jonah, Paul. We are sinking because of your hidden sin."

"Paul you did not take heed to the prophetic warnings years ago, and now this whole mess is your fault and we are going to die!"

Wow, chill out! Beloved Church there are myriads of people all around you who are eternally lost. They are in worse shape without God and a greater priority than our momentary light afflictions and problems. **Shake off** the "paralysis of analysis" of 2020 and let your light and testimony shine for Jesus.

We are to preach repentance, the kingdom is here and Christ is Lord. Good News! Don't let the world or circumstances frame your message. Take a lesson from Paul as a parallel for today. **Shake off** the devil's efforts and warm yourself in the fire of God's love.

Soon you will be healing the sick and setting the captives free in Jesus' name.