

A CHANGE OF MIND

Acts 28:1-10

A change of mind is not only a "woman's privilege," but also a man's. There are times when it is well to change one's opinion. The best people in the world have done this.

I. How The People Changed Their Minds About Paul.

To the barbarians on the island of Melita Paul was:

1. A stranger. Acts 28:2.

Paul's fourth shipwreck seems to have occurred in late October or early November. It was the beginning of winter when they arrived at Melita. They had escaped the buffeting of the sea and reached the shore by floating planks and pieces from the ship broken on the rocks. They were chilled by the icy waters of the sea, and the driving, cold rain.

Paul and his companions expected ill treatment from the natives of Melita when they were cast upon the shores of that island, but, to their surprise these barbarians kindled a fire and gave them a warm reception. The sea-drenched, shivering, storm-wrecked mariners found kindness where they had expected to find unkindness. They found love where they had expected hate. They found shelter where they had looked for afflictions.

These natives did not come down to the wrecked ship to plunder and to profit from the misfortunes of the helpless victims. They came offering sympathy, comfort and compassion. This was a surprising welcome. Their kindness was no camouflage for designing motives; they were sincere in their offers of benefaction.

We talk much about hospitality, but the heathen put it into practice. Where is the much advertised Southern hospitality today? It is gone North for the summer. Where is the Northern hospitality? It is gone South for the winter. The heathen of the first century put it into practice the year round.

The kindness of these natives was not the direct result of the Spirit of Christ, yet it was a fruit of the same flavor, though plucked from a different tree. We read in the Old Testament how Samson found honey in the carcass of a lion he had slain. The honey was just as good, though in the carcass of a lion, as if it had been found in a place prepared for it. The lesson to be learned is that Christianity does not have a monopoly on all the Christian graces. Many of them are found where least expected. Even pagans and heathen may possess some of the fine qualities which Christianity produces in others.

This incident proves that such graces do not make men Christians. Men may possess numerous praiseworthy virtues without being Christians. Liars may speak the truth sometimes; a thief may be honest at times; a robber may bestow benefactions on others sometimes. While men are known by their fruits, yet even apples may be tied to a thorn bush. A Christmas tree is covered with good things without having produced any of them.

If one had gone out to look for kindness he would not have gone to these barbarians to find it. While they could not speak the language of these shipmen, yet they spoke the universal language of kindness. Kindness is a language that needs no interpreter; it is understood by all.

2. A worker. Acts 28:3.

Paul was a doer, and not just a dreamer. He was a very practical, down-to-earth

sort of man. When there was a task to be done, you could always count upon Paul to do more than his part.

In the scene before us, instead of warming his chilled body by the fire, he was out searching for sticks that others might be benefited by the fire that he had had some definite part in producing. They saw in him a worker.

Natives, shipmen and prisoners all helped kindle the fire that warmed them. It was no time for anyone to show a selfish spirit. The interest of the individual must be subordinate to the greater interest of the whole. Smaller groups need to be interested in the larger groups of which they are a part. This is true when we consider family life, community life, denominational life or national life.

When a great cause is at stake, one needs to stop and ask himself, "What fagots have I put on the fire to increase it?" Too many of us are more concerned about warming by the fires which others have kindled than we are about helping to kindle the fires. Many go to church services with no thought other than warming by the fire, after others have kindled it, and have little thought about laying some small fagot on the flame to increase its warmth.

Do people know us as workers in the church, and for the Lord Jesus Christ, or simply as those who sit back and say, "Let somebody else do it"? Are we workers or shirkers?

3. A criminal. Acts 28:3-4.

In the bundle of sticks that Paul gathered was a viper, torpid from the cold. When it was warmed to life by the heat of the fire, it fastened its deadly fangs upon Paul's hand. The natives knew the venomous character of the serpent, and confidently believed the Apostle was a doomed man.

When the snake bit Paul, the natives arrived at one conclusion, namely, that he was an escaped murderer that could not avoid death even though he had survived the storm.

When those superstitious barbarians saw the serpent cling to the Apostle's hand they immediately changed their minds about him and impulsively classified him as an escaped murderer or a fugitive from justice. How quickly people's minds can change toward us! One minute we are acceptable, and the next we are outcasts.

Within a week, the people in Christ's day changed from a worshiping crowd to an antagonistic mob which demanded that He be crucified. As long as you are paying attention to your own business, gathering your own sticks up, as Paul did, you are alright, but let some unsavory rumor be circulated against you and then what? How many will stand by you at a time like that? Very few.

4. A god. Acts 28:5-6.

Paul simply and firmly shook the viper off his hand into the blazing fire. That was the end of the snake, but what about Paul? Was that to be the end of him? Every eye in that entire group was fixed upon him. Would he swell up and suddenly fall dead before their very eyes? Time would soon tell. When Paul suffered no harm from the snake bite, the natives changed their minds. They said that he was a god. What a transformation in thinking! Within a very brief time, they changed their minds concerning Paul--from regarding him as a criminal to esteeming him as a god. The pendulum swung to its farthest extreme. The reverse of this is seen in the life of our Lord during His last week here on earth. On Sunday He was adored and worshiped as God, but before the week was over He was nailed to a cruel cross between two robbers as if He were equally as guilty as they.

5. A benefactor. Acts 28:7-9.

On Melita there lived a very important citizen by the name of Publius, who was designated as "the chief man of the island." The pendulum again swings from one extreme to the other. Paul had just been in the presence of the lowest form of the human race--"barbarous people." Although he did not preach to them, he did impress them by his power over the bite of the snake, so much so that they called him a "god."

Instead of putting on a show, Paul aspired to do something of a more practical nature. Publius courteously received Paul and his companions into his home, where they lodged for three days. In the house was the father of Publius who at the time lay in bed sick of a fever. That proved to be just the opportunity for which Paul had been looking. He lovingly laid his hands upon that unfortunate man, and prayed the prayer of faith. The man was instantly healed by the power of God. Paul thus became a benefactor of the occupants of that home. When the word of the healing of Publius' father got abroad, people from all parts of the island who were diseased came and were healed. No one went away unblessed. Thus, Paul proved himself to be a great benefactor.

6. A celebrity. Acts 28:10a.

"Who also honored us with many honors." For one brief time, Paul basked in the limelight of popularity and praise. To him and his associates were given the key of the island, and doubtless honorary membership in various organizations.

7. A friend. Acts 28:10b.

Paul entered the island of Melita as a stranger and left it as a friend. This is as it should be in the case of all of us.

II. How Paul Previously Changed His Mind Concerning The Things Of God.

This takes us back to the time prior to his conversion.

1. He thought that Jesus was only human, but He was actually divine.
Paul's difficulty was spiritual blindness.
2. He imagined that Christians were real menaces, but they were real missionaries.
No more humble, holy, honorable and heroic men and women ever walked this earth than they.
3. He thought that Christ died as a rebel, but we know that He died as the world's only redeemer.
4. He contended that Christ's resurrection was a glaring fallacy, but it was a glorious fact.
The best established fact of history is the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
5. He regarded Christ as His greatest foe, but He was in reality his best friend.
6. He boasted that he was alright until he met Christ, but thereafter he always classified himself as "the chief of sinners."
The nearer we get to Christ the more we think of Him, and the less we think of ourselves. Paul underwent a complete change of mind. Have you?