

“NOT WHAT PEOPLE EXPECTED”
Numbers 21:4-9, Mark 5:1-20, Acts 28:1-10
September 20 & 21, 2025

“A little girl treated her mother badly because she was ashamed of her. Her mother had a big, ugly scar on her face. She looked horrible. The little girl would never bring her friends around because of the scar on her mother’s face. She would never invite her mother to school functions because of the scar on her face. Her mother finally asked her, ‘Honey, why don’t you ever bring your friends around? Why don’t you ever invite me to anything?’

“She said, ‘Mama, it’s the scar on your face. I can’t bear to introduce you to others.’

“Her mother said, ‘Darling, sit down. Let me tell you something I’ve never told you about the scar on my face. One day, I went out to draw water when you were a little girl, and when I looked back from the well, I saw the house was on fire. I rushed back in, dropped my water, and came and grabbed you, my little baby, out of the crib. The fire was engulfing you, but I got there just in the nick of time. On my way out of the house, one of the beams of the house collapsed and hit me across the face. It knocked me to the ground and seethed on my face for a period of time before I could get it off, but I was able to throw you to safety. I just wanted you to know, darling, the next time you don’t want your friends to see me, that the only reason I have a scar on my face is because I was saving your life.’

Many of us are ashamed of telling others that we belong to Jesus. We don’t invite others to come over to our house to meet Him. We certainly don’t invite others to come to worship with us. We don’t invite Jesus to come with us to events so that others might know that He is our Savior. We are ashamed of Him, possibly because of His scars.

You see, “Jesus has some scars on His hands. He’s got scars on His feet. He’s got scars on His back. He’s got scars on his head. He’s got a scar on His side. Let me tell you how He got those scars. You and I were on our way to hell because of our sins. We were on our way to

be separated from a holy God forever. But Jesus Christ looked down, and He didn't want us to suffer the consequences of sin. He told the Father, 'I'll go.' He came down and worked hard to save us, but the process of redemption required sacrifice. He received stripes on His back from the whipping of the Romans, and scars on His head from the crown of thorns they shoved on His brow. Then as penalty for our sins He was stretched out on a cross. They nailed His hands on the cross, His feet on the cross, and then stuck a spear in His side. He died our death for us. But on the third day, He rose from the dead to open the pathway for us to be with the Father.

“So the next time you don't want to tell anybody about Jesus, remember how He got His scars. The next time you don't want to be a disciple, remember how He got His scars. The next time you don't want to live for Jesus, remember how He got His scars. When you remember, tell Him you'll follow Him for the rest of your days. And then do your best to do it.”¹

We have to admit, though, that being a disciple of Jesus is not easy, for we must bear the sign of His cross on our hearts and in our lives. And as we live as followers of Jesus, the world turns against us, and Satan directs all sorts of problems and trials and temptations at us to get us to forget Jesus' sacrifice for us, and get us to turn to do our own thing without Him.

But as disciples of Jesus, we are to be willing to let the light of Jesus Christ shine through us so that everyone can see it. Think of it this way. “Stars show up at night. They burn bright all of the time; however, we can only see them at night when darkness is all around.

“Christians are to be unhindered light in a generation of people that prefer darkness rather than the light. In order to get us to shine, God many times allows situations in which, by reflecting His will, His perspective, and His viewpoint, we provide light to a ‘crooked and perverse’ generation (Deuteronomy 32:4-5).”²

¹ (Tony Evens, *Tony Evans' Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 342, #1037)

² (Ibid., pg. 195, #577)

How else will the people of the world see Jesus unless we live for Him and shine His love to the world? The Apostle Paul tells us, *“For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ”* (2 Corinthians 4:6). That’s our calling as followers of Jesus. We are to be His Light to all people, especially in the darkness of this world.

We’ve been seeing that the apostle Paul made the choice to follow Jesus and to proclaim Him everywhere he went, so that the people could learn about Jesus and put their trust and faith in Him and receive Him as their Savior. But the darkness in people’s hearts kept them from seeing what Jesus has done for us. Even with the light of Christ shining in Paul’s life, many would not believe. So Paul found himself traveling to Rome to face Caesar. But there were folks who needed to hear about Him before he made it to Rome. The folks on the ship he was traveling on, as well as those on the island of Malta.

The lesson from the Book of Acts today briefly tells us about his time on the Island of Malta, right after the shipwreck and storm. Listen how God used Paul on Malta. This is Acts 28:1-10. (READ Acts 28:1-10)

All 276 men that were aboard the ship Paul was traveling on made it to safety on the island. But because of the storm and the shipwreck, they’re wet, cold and needing shelter. The islanders did a great thing in helping them get a fire started so that they could warm up and get dry. It was an unexpected thing, coming from the native peoples of Malta.

You see, before Rome conquered the island, Malta had been colonized by the Phoenician peoples and spoke the Punic dialect. The Phoenician peoples were not considered cultured people, and because they spoke something different than Greek or Latin, they were considered

barbarians (KJV), or rough islanders (NEB), or natives (NASB and others). But these folks were not savages or primitive people, or a crude, uneducated group. It was because they spoke a language that was strange and not widely recognized by the Greeks and Romans. So their hospitality to the shipwrecked passenger and crew was quite unexpected. The fire would have warmed not only body but spirit, too.

Now, the men onboard the ship had come to respect Paul and consider him one that could help guide them to safety because God was with him. But the islanders didn't know Paul. So when he helped carry in brushwood for the fire, and a viper attaches itself to Paul's hand, they quickly come to the determination that he must be a murderer. He had found safety on the island, safe from the storm and shipwreck, but justice had finally caught up to him with the snake. They expected him to become overwhelmed by the venom of the viper's bite, but when nothing happened to him, they changed their mind and then considered him a god - or, perhaps, a favorite of the gods.

Notice that Paul did not rebuke them as he had rebuked the people at Lystra when they had considered him and Barnabas to be gods (Acts 14:15-18), but that was probably because they did not go to the point of worshipping him and trying to make a sacrifice to him as such.

But Paul's snakebite incident certainly caught the people off guard. Those who had traveled with him so far had seen and heard unexpected things from him, but when Paul was bitten by a viper and did not die from it, they may have begun to ask, "Who is this guy? Not even a snake can kill him!" The islanders would have certainly joined in wondering who Paul was. Surely, he was favored by God. His work was not yet done.

Unexpected things happen when the Lord God is involved in the life of the person. Look at how God disciplined the Israelites when they were grouching and complaining about their

journey toward the Promised Land. God allowed snakes to invade the camp, and those who were bitten died. But God commanded Moses to make a bronze serpent and put it on a pole so that those who were bitten by a snake could look at the bronze snake and find healing. By looking at the bronze snake, the people were reminded of their sin, and could repent once again, and then God would heal them.

And then in our Gospel lesson, Jesus touched the life of the most unlikely person in order to bring new life to him. “*A man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him*” (Mark 5:2). No one expected that this guy could ever be more than a demoniac. But with Jesus’ command, the legion of demons came out of the man and entered a herd of pigs. The pigs were destroyed by the demons, but the man was renewed and saved by his faith in Jesus. The most unlikely person then became an outstanding witness for Jesus in the Decapolis, telling the people what Jesus had done for him.

God uses unexpected events to call people back to Him. He uses tragic mass murders, like the shooting at Wedgewood Baptist Church in Texas, to bring people to faith in Jesus. Hundreds were converted when the pastor gave the Good News of Jesus during the funeral service for those killed.

God uses terrorist attacks, like the 9/11 attack, to get people to think beyond their everyday normal lives, and draw them back into faith in Jesus. Though it was a short lived revival, He used an unlikely event to draw people to Him.

And God can use us, in the most unlikely places and at the most unlikely time, to be the witnesses of faith in Jesus so that others might come to know Jesus through us. But “if you’re going month after month and year after year and there are no negative repercussions that ever come upon you because of your faith, then your faith has not been clearly demonstrated. If you

don't share your faith with others, you are a secret agent Christian or a Spiritual CIA member, and no one knows about it. You are a covert operative because there have been no repercussions for your faith.

“To put it another way, if you were accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? Would the district attorney be able to lift up particular incidents in your life that demonstrated Christian characteristics? Or would you be found innocent of all charges,”³ being found just like all of the other unbelievers in society?

Jesus wants us to be His disciples, freely and openly telling others about how He has changed our lives. There are so many people all around us who are dying eternally because no one has taken the time to tell them about Jesus. Jesus wants us to live such outstanding lives of faith that folks around us just can't help but see Jesus in everything we do and whatever we say.

The Apostle Paul used even a snakebite to demonstrate the power of God living within Him to be His servant. That's not to say we should test God by putting ourselves in cages with vipers and cobras to show that their venom has no effect upon us when we have faith in Jesus. But we should be ready to use every incident in our lives to tell of the marvelous work that Jesus has done for us through His death and resurrection.

So Paul continued to let Jesus use him as they find themselves in the estate of Publius, the chief official of the island. “*He welcomed [them] to his home and showed [them] generous hospitality for three days*” (Acts 28:7). And during that time, Paul finds that the father of Publius “*was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery*” (28:8). Paul then further brings about the unexpected as he prays for the man, and then cures him in the Name of Jesus, through the work of the Holy Spirit.

³ (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans' Book of Illustrations*, pg. 38, #84)

And that got everyone's attention such that the whole island heard about it, and all those who are sick were brought out to Paul and they were cured! Paul followed Jesus' example by healing the people of Malta of their illnesses and diseases, just as Jesus had done in Galilee when the people of Syria brought out their sick (Matthew 4:23-24).

From surviving a venomous snakebite, to curing the folks on the island, Paul let Jesus work through Him to touch the lives of all the people on Malta. Then, imagine the opportunity Paul and the other Christians had to tell everyone about the Good News of Jesus' Salvation for all those who will believe. Paul is not only demonstrating that he is a follower of Jesus, but he is accumulating more and more evidence that Jesus makes a huge difference in the lives of those who trust in Jesus and let Him become their Savior and Lord.

The Gospel writer, Luke, "Seems to have included [this activity] to illustrate the continuing power of Paul's ministry despite his being in Malta as a prisoner destined for a hearing before Caesar. **No matter what the circumstances are, the true servant of Christ is, like Paul, never off duty for the Lord.**"⁴

So what has God got for us to do if we stay faithful as Jesus' follower? We might be in some very dark places, surrounded by the darkness of the world. We might be rubbing shoulders with all sorts of folks who do not know the value of having Jesus as Savior and Lord. What might we do in faith to help them come to know Jesus?

"In the movies, there are previews of coming attractions. This is where the hot clips of the upcoming movies are shown. These cuts of the movies are always of the most exciting scenes: the fight scenes, the love scenes, or the chase scenes. The moviemakers show you the best clips because they want you to tune in to the whole show. Now, the movie itself may actually be terrible, but you'll never know it by the clips!

⁴ (Richard N. Longenecker, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981] vol. 9, pg. 564)

“One day there is a big show coming to town. God is the Producer, the Holy Spirit is the Director, and Jesus is the Superstar. It will be a worldwide production. In the meantime, God has left you and me here as previews of the coming attractions. As disciples of Christ, we’re supposed to be the hot clips of the upcoming show, so that when people see our clips, they conclude the show must be hot. From watching our previews, people should raise the question, ‘Where can I buy a ticket to the show?’ It is then that we can tell them, ‘You don’t have to buy a ticket; the price has already been paid.’”⁵

Our lives will determine how people around us view Jesus. Will we be silent, undercover Christians who never let anyone know that we are followers of Jesus? Or will we let the unexpected events in our lives give us the opportunity to shine for Jesus all the more so that everyone can see our witness and seek more for their own life, too? That’s our call as we profess our faith in Jesus. It’s not to be just salvation for ourselves, but to become a preview of what Jesus can do in a person’s life as we trust in Him with our whole heart and follow Him every day. But the choice is ours, and we will be astounded by how God can use us if we let Him.

Let’s pray. Father, thank You so much for Your call in our lives to be your witnesses. Give us the faith to turn to Jesus, receive His forgiveness for our sins, and then freely tell all those around us how He has released us from our fears, cured us from our diseases, guided us in our decisions, and changed our lives. The world around us is dying to hear our testimonies. Give us the faith to not only claim Jesus’ Salvation for ourselves, but to freely share it with all those around us, even the most unacceptable, the most vile, the most undeserving people. For we do not know how You could use them. Let us live for You every day, In Jesus’ Name. AMEN.

⁵ (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, pg. 80, #214)