



## **Courageous Endurance – Part 5**

### **Not Doubting God's Authenticated Message**

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Well, every time we near the end of a verse-by-verse study of a book of the Bible which of course we are nearing here as we enter the last chapter of the book of Acts, it always sends me scrambling and praying to figure out where we are to go next. And if I figure out where we're going next I've got to certainly take into consideration where we've been. So I always go back and start looking at where we've been, what I've preached, what's been recorded, what's out there on the website, all that. I look through all of that. And in doing so I kind of quickly turn from the trail of looking at the books and the places we've studied to how many times we've actually studied it, I'm just talking about this church, my work here in this church. I realize that as of this hour, right here, before I stepped up here, I had stood up to preach to this congregation 2,702 times, I realize this is a lot. (audience applause) Some of you applaud. I sighed with exhaustion. Then I thought they probably think he should be much better at this than he is if he's done that many times. So I realize that that's a lot of times to stand up and talk about, you know, the Bible. This is one, you know, collection of books, but it's one book. It's in one, you know, leather-covered book. It's amazing that, you know, I can stand here, as I often do for an hour at a time 2,702 times just for this congregation in the last two decades. That's a lot of preaching about one book.

And it would be, I suppose, if we were talking every time we got together about the book A Tale of Two Cities or something like that. Right? If this were, you know, Clancy or, you know, Agatha Christie or something, we just had one of her books and we're just like, we're going to study this book for 2,000 hours for two decades. It'd be like, that's a little much, right? At some point you've exhausted the topic. But the difference, of course, with the Bible is that this is a unique author, right? He's in a category literally by himself. I mean, there's no doubt about it. He's not Hawthorne. He's not Twain. He's not, you know, Steinbeck. He is a completely unique author in a category that we would call transcendent. He's the maker of all things. And he's given us a book, a book that is inexhaustible. Right? I mean, the implications and explanations about this book could take the rest of our lives. And that's how I feel, exhausted, looking at all the sermons that have been preached from this platform, but also thinking to myself I feel like we barely scratched the surface when we look at the breadth of God's word and the depth of all of these books of the Bible. I realize that because this particular book is very unique. The book says about itself in Romans Chapter 11 verse 33, he says, you know, "The depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" That's a great verse that reminds us that things that we read about in the Bible they're beyond tracing out, we can't get to the bottom of it in one lifetime. And that certainly is true.

It's true although you could say, well, you could write a book or I could write a book that just, you know, it says it's unique, it says it's inexhaustible. But I would challenge you to try that and just see if it becomes the bestselling book in all of the world, millions and millions are sold and downloaded every day around the world. It has been the number one, you know, propagated, handed out, downloaded book that has ever been written. And so it's unique in



that regard. And yet still it's a self-claim. And when you're looking at that you want to look for more, which takes me back to thinking about how it got here. And whenever we think about how it got here, particularly if we thumb through the Bible, we realize there are people's names at the top of a lot of these books. And here's Habakkuk and here's Amos and here's Isaiah. And it's like, okay, well this seems like books written by people. But every time we look at the Bible we understand the depths and the riches and the wisdom and knowledge of God that are inscrutable and beyond tracing out, we start to recognize, well, there must be something unique about these authors, the human instruments through which this book came.

And that brings me back to the passage that I was given to study this week in Acts Chapter 28 verses 1 through 10 as we enter into the last chapter of the book of Acts. I find that in this chapter we read about the Apostle Paul and I was reminded that I studied this text. Well, look at the uniqueness of this individual. He's the one, certainly, as I look at all the things that we can possibly study verse by verse in this next season of the church, if God gives us life and breath, I'm thinking there's a good chance I might be a Pauline epistle because Paul wrote a good chunk of the New Testament. And as we read the narrative of his life as we reach this particular place in the shipwreck narrative where he gets washed up on the shore as they all swam forward as the boat got wrecked and the ship sank. Here they are on this island and Paul is distinguished among all the others. There are 276 people on this ship and yet Paul stands out as unique among them all. And I would say to you because of the role that he plays in particular as it relates to us because he is the author of a good chunk of this thing we call the Bible.

So take a look at this passage with me as we pick up the story and let's understand how this all works and why it works the way it does by studying the first ten verses of Acts 28. Acts Chapter 28, I'll read from the English Standard Version, we'll read these first ten verses as you remember where we were, the boat has been broken into pieces. It got stuck on a reef. It's in tatters. And the storm is still going on. It's dark. It's cold. I mean, it's daytime. It's morning, but it's cold and rainy and overcast. It says this in verse 1 of Acts 28. Follow along. I'll read the first ten verses. "After we were brought safely through," through what? Through the storm, this tempest as it was called earlier. We learned that the island was called Malta. "The native people showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all." And that's a relief. You could have come upon a place and though who are these people? But there has been kindness shown to them and that's great. "And they kindled a fire and welcomed them." Why? "Because it had begun to rain and it was cold." We need a fire to warm ourselves on the beach. They're all wet. I mean, you just picture this. "When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks," so he's helping, he's trying to, you know, help this fire and he's going to put them on the fire, it says, "A viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand."

Now, I was probably ten years old when I learned the difference between a venomous snake and a non-venomous snake. It's not hard to figure out and I'm a city boy. And so clearly all these islanders knew exactly what a venomous snake looked like. They probably can tell you all the different kinds of venomous snakes on the island of Malta. And they knew exactly what kind of snake had latched on to the hand of the Apostle Paul. And they figured, this snake

was going to kill him. And it says in verse 4, "When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, 'No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he's escaped the sea,'" I mean, they barely got here with the wet shirt on their back, "Justice has not allowed him to live." Now, the New International Version translators have capitalized the word "justice," and perhaps it is that they think this is a goddess that, you know, they think is always in charge of figuring this all out. But, you know, kind of read this as you would when someone says, well, karma had its way in this person or, you know, he wasn't going to get away from the powers-that-be or whatever. And that could be. Or maybe they are thinking of justice as an abstract concept. I'm not sure whether it should be capitalized or not, it doesn't matter. The point is they're saying the guy is going to die from this snake bite because we know a venomous snake when we see one, because they're all standing there within feet of the Apostle Paul.

"He, however," verse 5, "shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their mind." He's not a criminal murderer that justice is now killing, karma is now taking out. "They said he's a god." Now, that's zero-to-hero story really quick, right? They're saying, "Stand back, this guy's a murderer. Watch him die. We're going to get to see him die. We are going to see him swell up, get bloated, fall down, and he's going to stop breathing. We're going to watch the death of him. We know what these snakes do. We know what kind of snake bite him." They were sure he was going to die and yet he doesn't. And so his cred goes from down here to up here. I mean, like off the charts, right? He's a god. He's a God. He's got divine power. Now, I've got so much to say about this but let's keep reading because he is now in the middle in verse 7, he's the hero of the island. "Now, the neighborhood of that place where lands belonging to the chief man on the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us," remember, Luke and Aristarchus are there with Paul, "hospitably for three days. It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him, healed him. And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island," as you would imagine, they lined up, we got a healer on the island now, "who had diseases and they came and they were cured."

If you want an understatement? Here comes verse 10, the understatement of the chapter. "They also honored as greatly," well I guess so, "and when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed." I mean, think about this. The no charge, you know, medics are here healing everyone, not by saying, here, take this secret potion or we'll sell you these leaves or this mixture or here are, you know, your essential oil to take your aches away. They were there just freely watching the Apostle Paul lay his hands on people and they're healed. Now, how did he get into the most important person's house on the island? Well, because a snake latched on to his hand and he should have died from that snake, and yet he didn't die from that snake. Now, if you're not going to die from a snake bite, you better get to it quick, you better get as much venom out of that as possible, you might want to shoot some anti-venom into the guy's bloodstream and maybe he'll rally. But, I mean, there's going to be some effects. It's going to be... But none of that happens. And yet he does not die. He goes on with things.

And I just want to remind you, in the first four verses here, I just want you to picture the scene in your own mind. You have been through a terrible two weeks of storm. You went out there on this storm and everything... all hope is lost. You've thrown all the luggage, the cargo, everything off the ship. You're wandering around without seeing the sun or the stars. It's been overcast the whole time. Your ship has now hit a reef and everything is lost. You have nothing but the wet clothes on your back and you swam into the shore and you're there and you're thinking, wow, just like God told Paul, all 276 people on this ship are going to be delivered and every last one of them, the headcount, everyone is here. The merchant marines, the centurion, the Roman soldiers, the prisoners, everyone is here on this little 18-mile Island, 60 miles south of Sicily. They're there. They're all accounted for. It's raining. It's cold. You built a fire and it's like, wow, just like God said, Paul's going to make it to Rome. He's going to stand before Caesar just like he said way back in Caesarea when this whole sailing thing started.

Amazing, were it not for the snake. And then the snake comes out and God goes, oh no, a snake. And God says oops. And so do you know what God has to do here in this passage? He has to heal Paul because God didn't see that snake coming. Do you think that's an accurate exposition of this passage? Do you think this surprised God, do you think God said, "Oops, a snake bit Paul?" He got the news from some angels. Like, "I didn't know that would... Well, here's what... That's okay. I can write a check. I'll write the miracle check and he will not die. I will put the anti-venom into his blood instantly. There will be no harm to him. I'll make sure he doesn't die from that." God is never backed into a corner. And while I want to talk to you about never doubting God's affirmed and attested authenticated Word. That's where we're going to go. I can't help but be pastoral here, at least in the first point, to remind you, as we've looked at Paul's life as a pattern of your life and said, well, a lot of trials, God sends you through a lot of storms and then there's some of those pains that come into your life, like the snake bite. You might think of Second Corinthians Chapter 12 where Paul talks about a messenger of Satan latching onto his body, a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him to make him be in pain. He's got some chronic illness that he says is "a messenger of Satan."

Or you read Job as we've looked at throughout the series and we see Satan attacking Job, not only his family and killing his children, not only taking all of his resources, all of his wealth, but also attacking his body in Chapter 2 and he's sick. This is a horrible scene of Satan attacking. And now all of a sudden Paul is attacked by a snake of all things. I mean, it couldn't be more symbolic of the reality of Satan's hatred for God's children. And all I have to say, with God guiding this entire ship with the attention on all that's going on and making sure every last soul on that ship makes it onto the shores of Malta safely, and they're going to board in Chapter 28 verse 11 they're going to board another ship and are they going to make their way to Rome. But I'm just saying, did God say, "Oh man, the snake. I didn't account for the snake. I'm going to have to respond to this." That's not how it works. There must be a purpose for his getting bitten by a snake. And it must be preparing some kind of scene to unfold in the next six verses. But why does he get bit by a snake in the first four verses? You'd have to say, well, I guess God had a plan for that, and if you would guess that you would be right because that's exactly how the Bible presents every crisis that any Christian faces. So much so that I



hope you learn very early in your Christian life the truth of Romans 8:28. You've heard it quoted to you, maybe flippantly, maybe without compassion, but there's truth in the words, even if they fall flat on your ears because you think, well, if I'm loved by God, if I'm blessed by God, I do not understand why God let this happen to me. And yet someone comes to you and quotes Romans 8:28, you know what? "All things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose."

So get over your snake bite. Right? That's kind of how you feel, like, well, wait a minute. And yet you have to know that you believe, I hope you believe, in what God says about himself. And that is that he's never going to let anything touch Job's life unless he gives permission to let it touch Job's life. And there's not a thing that's going to touch Paul's body unless God gives permission for something to touch Paul's body. That is exactly how this works in the Bible. That's called God's sovereignty. That means his dominion, his care, his control, his oversight does not allow anything, his supervision will not allow anything into the lives of believers unless it's going to work out for good according to the purpose for which he's called that Christian to live out his life. And we can look at this passage and we can make some pretty good guesses, I think by the time we're done with the first ten verses as to why God would pick for Paul to get bitten by a snake.

But before we get to him, let's talk about you. Now you got things in your life that have come and latched on to you and you've said this is not good, this hurts, this is painful. And maybe you identify with Job. Maybe someone in your family has died prematurely in your mind like this should not have happened. Or you're looking at your own body like Job who's had his body wracked with pain or like Paul in a chronic illness that won't go away. Or maybe it's financial like it was for Job and all your resources are gone. I don't know what it is that's latched onto you, but you're saying this in and of itself cannot be argued as good. It in itself is bad. Being bitten by a snake. If you call me on Tuesday and say I got bitten by a snake today, I'm going to go that's bad. There's no way that's a good thing. That's a bad thing. But if you're a Christian I'm supposed to believe that God is sovereign in the middle of that crisis. I got a call early this morning that one of our congregants was in the hospital with some unknown thing. And I think, okay, I'm going to think like James Chapter 5, someone is suffering, we need to pray. Right? This is bad. Of course it's bad. You're in Mission Hospital E.R. That's bad. And I'm thinking to myself, okay, but God says that every crisis that comes into the life of every believer, every follower of Christ, he is sovereignly involved in.

And we've got to stop and we've got to say right here, God did not say, oops, a snake got on Paul's hand, got latched on Paul's hand. God did not say oops. He never says oops. Okay? Number one in your outline, just jot this down. You need to "Affirm God's Sovereignty in Every Crisis." We're going to use Paul's crisis as a template. You know, this snake did not get through God's oversight of Paul's life. We know that. And you've just got to believe if you're a Christian that when you say "God works everything after the counsel of his will" and you start quoting Ephesians Chapter 1, or you say in Romans 8:28 all things, all things good and bad. Because the context of Romans 8, if you haven't read it recently, the context is the church in Rome was suffering. They were being persecuted. He's talking about suffering. But he says, you know what? None of that is given to you that is not working its way out for God's good



purpose. There's a good purpose and God's using that in some way for good. That's what the Bible teaches that in every single crisis God's sovereignty, it's there. God puts his hands and nothing happens without the permission of God in your life. All the bad thing, all the bad things.

Now, there are a lot of people who don't believe that. They don't believe that. They think somehow God is like an "oops God." And every time something gets turned around like in this passage we've already read it, he does not die from this. And I've got to tell you the word for that in the Bible is miracle. You don't get bit by a venomous snake that all the islanders know this is going to kill the guy, just watch. It's going to kill him. And all of a sudden now he goes about his work. And by the way, don't think that he got bit by the snake and went "Ah. Hey, guys, watch this. Nothing's going to happen to me." I don't think that was Paul's mindset. Now, somehow in his mind, I'm sure he's thinking what you would think if you got bit by a snake this afternoon. That's bad. Do you think he was scared? As scared as a teetering ladder that you're standing on, a 12-foot ladder, you know, starts to fall, you're going to think that's bad. I'm sure his immediate reaction was, "Oh no!" As yours would be. But in his mind he's got to know this. I know I'm going to get to Rome. This isn't going to kill me, it can't kill me. He's got the advantage of knowing God's good purpose for him on this sailing trip. We don't always know the details of God's good purpose for us. But God has got a purpose that he's working out and it's a good thing in his plan.

But we have to understand that this was not a mistake. God did not have to now issue the allowance of a miracle. He did not have to perform a miracle to get himself out of a mess because circumstance backed him into an alley. That's not how God works. He didn't have to make a U-turn here. "Oh man. I can't believe the snake drove Paul down a one-way alley. I got to take the wrecker in here and tow him out of this." That's not how God works. God let him into the alley. That little snake when the snake was little and it was growing up on the island of Malta, and it was having its venomous sacs develop on the side of it's head. It was made for the purpose. One of the purposes was to latch onto Paul's hand one day when he went and collected sticks. That was the purpose of God for that snake. That is the sovereign plan of God. I know a lot of people struggle with that. We've talked about it in this series. We understand that. We got to somehow try and in our minds harmonize the idea of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility and culpability before God's revealed standard. I get that. But you have to stop this morning and say there's not a single thing that's come into my life that was not a part of God's sovereign plan for me. And in that you want to pray. When I hear someone's in the hospital at five in the morning on a Sunday morning, I'm going to pray that they get out. I'm going to pray that there's going to be relief. I'm going to do exactly what James 5 says, "Whoever is suffering, let him pray." And so I want to pray. Right? And I want that to be fixed. But I can never think that that detour into the pain is some kind of mistake. And it wasn't for the Apostle Paul here. Nothing surprises God. Nothing is an oops.

Now, in our passage, we're going to have a very specific reason, I believe, that will be easy to see why this happened. But I want you to know that in your case, whatever the last venomous bite was in your life, when Satan got a hold of something in your life that clearly is bad. I don't know the specific reason, but I can tell you one of the reasons and it is an important reason



that underlies every trial, every deprivation, every crisis that you've ever had. So think of the last one you've had. And I want to turn to James Chapter 1 and take you to some familiar verses. I know we have to quote these often because we have a lot of bad things happen in our Christian lives. But I want to underscore it. I'd like to give it a few words of explanation here and just take you back to a truth that we have to reaffirm when the bad things happen. A snake bite is a bad thing. But here's one reason I know that whatever God allowed to get latched onto your life that hurt, I know this is one of the reasons, if in fact you are a Christian. I'm talking to Christians here now.

Verse 2. Let's skip the first four words because that's too much for us to handle. We'll skip those. Okay? But let's start with "My brothers." So we know Paul is talking to Christians here, right? "My brothers," talking to the people of God, the children of God, the people who have faith in Christ. "When you meet trials of various kinds," it could be a snakebite, it could be a shipwreck, it could be whatever it is in your life that's painful. "For you know," and now that "for you know" it has to get back to the first four words of verse 2, we'll get there later. But he says, "For you know," if you're going to do whatever the first four words say, which you've already read now five times, you know this, "that the testing of your faith." Now let's stop there. That's one thing I know that every... your loss of your job, the relationship that went south, the financial problems you have, the struggles in your marriage, whatever it is, the problem with your kids, whatever it is that is a trial, various trials of various kinds, I know this: it was a test of your faith. Just like when the snake got latched on to Paul's hand he's thinking to himself, if he is standing there like I've got to still trust that what God says is true and God says he cares for me. God says He loves me. God says, he'll never leave me or forsake me. God says he's got a good plan for my life. And in his mind he even knows God says, I'm going to make it to Rome. Well, I may be sick. I may be in the hole of the ship in the infirmary on the way to Rome, he may be thinking that, but he's thinking I know God's promises are still true. It's faith. It's trusting that what God says is true which is going to get back to the whole theme of the sermon, the real theme of the sermon.

But pastorally, I just want you to see one thing the last pain in your life is doing is testing whether or not you're still going to say, "Hey, I believe God." Because you all go on buy those blessed flags and the blessed, you know, stuff in your house and you got the pillow on your couch. Blessed. Do you have one of those? Right? You bought it at Hobby Lobby or whatever. Blessed. Well, you might feel like turning it over when the viper is attached to your hand. You got some pain in your life, right? And the question is, do you have enough faith to still say I know that I'm blessed, as Paul said in Ephesians Chapter 1 verse 3 "With every spiritual blessing in the heavenly place." I know I'm still God's child, the inheritor of all the blessings of God. I'm still blessed, even though right now I've been diagnosed with that or I've had this struggle or I've been betrayed by this person. I know I am blessed. So in your faith do you still affirm that? You have to affirm that God is still good and God still loves you and you are still his child and he still has a good purpose for your life. All of that has to be true and affirmed in your life. It's going to test your faith, which it does. Just like when Abraham was told out there in Genesis 22 to go take a knife and kill his son. That was mind-boggling! And just think about it. He's got to say God's got a good plan here somehow. I don't know what it is but I'm going to trust him.



And if you make it through this trial trusting him, it will produce, now this is a great Greek word I've said it often from this platform in the 2,702 hours I've been up here. "Hypomone." Do you remember that word? It translates here "steadfastness." I look back as I was looking back at old sermons. I found the old title of the sermon I preached on this particular passage. I called it "stick-to-itiveness." Wasn't that cute and clever? "Stick-to-itiveness." It is not really a word, but it's a great way to translate the idea of hypomone. Steadfastness means you're willing to stick to it. You're willing not to give up. As I often say as I talk about this Greek word, I only say it because it's a compound with a preposition on the front. "Hypo" means "under" and "Monē" means to "remain," to "remain under." It's like the old, as I said from my childhood, I go down to Tijuana when I was a kid, not on my own, but as a kid, I would go down there with the church group or whatever, and I'd see the burro, the donkey there with all that stuff stacked up on its back. Or if you go to the Grand Canyon and they pack all that stuff on these mule packs and you think, wow, their back is arching, are they going to collapse under all that? Hypomone means you get a lot piled up in your life but you don't crash. Your faith does not crash. You don't stop trusting God.

And if you were to make it through this next test, guess what happens? You get stronger, steadfastness, and you've got to let steadfastness, the stick-to-itiveness in your faith have its full effect that you may be, now here's a hard word for you to process, perfect. Okay. We struggle with that. Jesus used the same word over there in the Sermon on the Mount. He said, "Be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect." And when you think of the word perfect, you'd never stand up, I hope, in your small group and say I'm perfect. Right? I made it through the last trial, I'm perfect. Because we think of a linear set of behaviors and words and actions and decisions that we think they're all good. We've done good, and we have a linear, like a flawless record. We're not talking about time here. We're talking about when you respond to whatever it is that's in front of you, you respond rightly. Jesus' context for saying you're to "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" is that he brings rain on the fields of both the evil and the good. And he's saying, can't you just pray for your enemy instead of just cursing them? And he said, if you were to do that, you would do a "Teleios." That's the word "perfect," teleios thing, which is not holiness, it's not "Hagios," like you've never sinned. Is that in that situation can you respond rightly? So here the next word is helpful, "complete, lacking in nothing." For what? For whatever comes next. Can you get through this trial with faith that's intact with a stronger Christianity so that you're ready to do whatever you need to do, whatever you need, the completeness and teleios-ness of what you have to have to do whatever comes next?

So when God brings in a trial, when there's a viper attached to some part of your Christian life and you're struggling, you need to remember I know one purpose for sure, it's to get you ready for whatever comes next. And God is trying to build your faith. Can you have a resilient faith in the midst of that? And the only way you can do that is to go back to God's Word, back to God's promises, which is why I'm preaching this message because I want you to be absolutely assured that the promises that God has made that are recorded in the pages of Scripture through people like the Apostle Paul, they're absolutely guaranteed, sure and reliable. And that's why I've got to think about why Paul is special here. Paul is special where





God is doing something that everyone is going to go, wow! The islander's jaws are dropping because this snake was attached to his hand so God could do something miraculous. Not because someone put some salve on it or sucked out the venom, but because God was going to do something that no one could deny was a miracle. So guess what? Paul's going to be the special guest of the most important person on the island. Publius is going to have Paul come in and then he's going to do miracles for Publius and everyone else in town. Everyone's going to come to the Apostle Paul.

Now, what's the Apostle Paul's job? He has a business card. What does it say? Apostle Paul, Missionary. He's representing Christ, ambassador of Christ, but in a special way because he's not just an ambassador, he speaks with the full authority of Christ. That's what an apostle is. It's a translated Greek word, "Apostolos," and apostolos means you're coming with the full weight of the authority. In our day it would be someone to have the complete checkbook of whoever sent him. I can write whatever check. I can do the things and have the gravitas and weight of the person who sent me. That's why the apostles are a very special band of people in the Scripture. And the reason God brings that in is because he has something to say through his apostles and prophets. Right? Look at our text now. Go back to Acts Chapter 28 verse 5. "He shook the creature off and suffered no harm. They waited for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead." He didn't. "They wait a long time." Like there's got to be something. Nothing happened. Nothing bad happened. No misfortune. "They changed their minds and said he was a god." Now that's shooting too high, right? You've overshot this. Apostles are not gods. John was an apostle on the island of Patmos. Right? All of these things happen. He bows down to the angel. It happens even to Daniel, right? There are all these examples of people who are revered and it's like, "No, no, no. We're not God, there's no way we're God." The angels do that. It's clear in the Scripture that we do not take that position.

Now, Luke doesn't record any of that but we know what Paul would say. We've already seen it in Paul's ministry where he says, Listen, we're not Greek gods, we're not divine, we're not deity, but we do have a message that's authoritative from heaven and he gives that message. But that miracle exalted him. He went from zero to hero as I said. Now he's the hero of the island. He's going to have the red carpet laid out by the most important person on the island. And all of that is so that people will listen to him, listen to him. And he does this, God does, in a particular way. You can call it attestation or sometimes I call it an imprimatur. It's some kind of a divine authentication of his spokesperson and you need to respect that in the Scripture because we see it in the Scripture through the entire Bible of his apostles and prophets.

Number two, "Respect How God Authenticated His Spokesman." Forty authors in the Bible, over 1,500 years of time. And when you think about when did the Bible start, you might think about Adam and Eve or you might think about Abraham. It didn't start until 1445 B.C. when out of Egypt this guy came who was known as the prophet of God, and the prophet of God was named Moses and Moses was going to write. He was educated in the best universities in Egypt, and he's now in the wilderness. And he is told as he's working in the second 40 years of his life for his father-in-law, Jethro, that he's going to be sent back to be a spokesperson for God. "Go tell Pharaoh let the Israelites go." That was the message. And the first thing he says, even though he's watching something miraculous take place, this bush is burning and

it's not being consumed. And God says, go tell him to let the people go. And Moses says what you would say. How in the world do you think he is going to believe me? Right? He outranks me. There's no way I can come as a runaway person in the house of Pharaoh and now I'm a shepherd working for my father-in-law. There's no possible way he's going to listen to me. Why should he listen? Well, tell him that "I AM" sent you. Okay? Does that help, right? They're still not going to listen to me. I can tell him Yahweh sent me, the God of the universe, but he's not going to believe me. Then God says, "What is that in your hand?" Right? Moses says, "A staff." God says, "Throw it down on the ground," and it becomes a snake. God says, "Now go and reach out for the tale of a snake." Now, learning a little bit about snakes this morning, don't take a snake by the tail. That's not how you grab a snake. So by faith he takes that snake by the tail and it turns back into a staff. That'll get your attention, right? If you think they won't listen, trust me. I will authenticate you as my spokesperson. And Moses goes. And he does it, right?

This is magic. Magic. And you know what that means. We're breaking the rules of nature. Magic today we call them illusionists because we think well they're not magicians. They're doing illusions. The magicians of Egypt came and did similar things. Right? Whether it was illusions or whether it was accurate and tapping into Satanic or whatever it was when he sat there and did these things, Pharaoh still didn't believe him because it wasn't just to the leader that Moses needed to be authenticated. It was to everybody. And so guess what? God then ups the ante by making sure that Pharaoh in his rebellion against God continues in that rebellion long enough for God to bring in all the authentication that everyone in the whole place needed. And that came in a set of ten. And it's not the Ten Commandments. It was called the Ten Plagues. And those ten plagues affected everyone and it all took place based on what the prophet said. And when the prophets said it, it happened and when the prophet stopped, it stopped. And those ten plagues convinced everyone. This guy is like a god. And all of a sudden now they believe Moses. And then Moses sat down and he wrote, out in the wilderness, he wrote the Ten Commandments when they finally got out of Egypt. And then he wrote the first five books of the Bible. And people said ever since these are the words of God through the Prophet Moses. This is the pattern all throughout the Bible. Show that the spokesperson of God is a genuine, authenticated, attested spokesperson of God and we'll do that by breaking natural law.

Are you still in Acts 28? Drop down to the bottom of this chapter, almost to the bottom. Look at verse 25. "And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul made one statement." What didn't they like? Here's what he said. "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers," verse 26, "Go to this people and say, "Indeed you will hear but never understand." Now, I skipped a few words there, but read it again. "The Holy Spirit was right and said..." Who said something to the fathers? The Holy Spirit did. The Holy Spirit was trying to say something to the fathers back in the Old Testament and then because they were Jews, they're your fathers, your ancestors. The Holy Spirit said it. Yeah, I missed these last four words: "through Isaiah the prophet." The prophet, that word in the Old Testament "Nabi" In Hebrew, it means a mouthpiece. It's like a megaphone. God picked up a conduit through which to speak to the people. Who was speaking? God was speaking. Whose name is on the



book of Isaiah? He's quoting the book of Isaiah Chapter 6 here, whose name was on it? Isaiah's name. Who wrote these words?

Well, this is the problem with Bible study altogether. And when you go to seminary, unfortunately, sometimes the focus is so much on the literary compositions through human authors that we lose sight of the main author because there's one author to the Bible. That's why the 40 authors through 1,500 years can give us a message that we can write systematic theologies on. Why can we write a systematic theology about topics? If you pick one, we can find a systematic theology being written where everything is all unified through all 40 authors through 1,500 years because there's one author. And that one author is utilizing people. This is how the book started in Acts Chapter 1 verse 16, he talks about God speaking through David. The Holy Spirit said through David, this is how it works. And guess what? God is going to speak to the Church through the Apostle Paul. He's going to speak verbally to the people who lived on Malta, and he's going to speak to us if we study a Pauline epistle. It is God's Word. We call it God's Word. The overarching author of the Bible is God. He picks up human authors and says, "Listen to this human author. He's speaking for me." How do we know? Because the author does something that no one else can do. God breaks and suspends natural law.

Now, unfortunately, the miracles have people like John Wimmer, "Oh, I just want to do the Bible stuff. I want to do miracles. I want to see miracles." You may want to see them but God has a purpose for them. And the purpose you can read about in Hebrews Chapter 2 verses 1 through 4, it is to affirm and confirm that the message is God's. And he does that by various signs and wonders and miracles according to his will. The Spirit of God is doing this to do something to get people to say this is not a normal literary work. God authenticates his spokesman through the miraculous. Elijah, Elisha, I mean, they're doing miraculous signs. Elijah is praying, as James 5 says, looking back and summarizing the fact, he prays and the weather stops raining for three years, he prays again and it starts. You're going to listen to that guy. That guy's got some power. Now, is he a god giving credit to himself? No, Paul didn't give credit to himself. We don't see how he deflected that but surely he deflected that because that's what godly people do. He'd already deflected that earlier in the book. We know he's not taking credit. He's giving credit to God. These miracles, just like Peter's miracles, who writes to us some letters that are very important, have eternal worth, because they're the Word of God. All of that is coming through an author who has been authorized and authenticated by miraculous signs.

And according to Revelation Chapter 21 and according to Ephesians 2:20 there are only 12 apostles. I believe that Paul is the 12th apostle. It wasn't the guy they rolled dice for in Acts Chapter 1. We have 12 guys who are doing this work and they're doing this work and they're authenticated as spokespersons authorized by God to go out and give a message when there's no New Testament. I say it often that way. They're teaching New Testament truth, New Testament theology, without a New Testament. Well, how do we know who to listen to? I can write a book. I could write the newest New Testament. That's been tried. A guy named Joseph Smith tried that. Right? Here's the newest, new new of the new Right? You can do that all you want. But unless we have God authenticating this miraculously and it matching



because God is the author of it all, it has to match all of what's said, which of course, the Book of Mormon fails miserably at that, and so does Doctrine and Covenants and all the rest and everybody else, The Watchtower Tract Society with the Jehovah Witnesses, because whoever else is out there claiming this it better be miraculously attested and it ought to match what God's Word says. And Jude says, now this is it. This is the last of it. And we have it all summarized at the end of this book called the book of Revelation where all of it is at the very end and God knows exactly how this is going to end in the middle of the 90s A.D.. If you add to this book you're a mess and you better not even try it. If you take away from it don't do that either. This is God's Word. He has spoken through the apostles and prophets.

Turn to Second Peter Chapter 1. Speaking of Peter, who had miracles in the early part of the book to prove that he is a prophet, take a look at how he puts this. Second Peter Chapter 1. Look at verses 20 and 21, "Knowing first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture," right? And prophecy doesn't mean necessarily it has to do with the future, although it has to be punctuated with that, as it often is in the Bible, because that authenticates it in and of itself. A literary miracle is that there is something that is recorded before something else happens. That's why the Dead Sea Scrolls were important. When everyone started to say that the Old Testament prophecies were written after the New Testament truth and the history of the New Testament. It's not that way. God had collected a whole library of all the books of the Old Testament save one, which was surely there in the dust and the fragments somewhere. But all these books of the Old Testament were preserved before the time of Christ and that's when those were penned as copies of the Old Testament to make clear to everyone that God does not write these prophetic statements after the fact. And in this text it says none of this "comes from someone's own interpretation." Here's how I'm reading the situation. Here's what I think God is like. No. "No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man." No one sits down to write the Bible, "but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." And they not only spoke as Paul's going to speak on the island of Malta, but they also sat down and wrote and in Chapter 28 it's going to end that way. He's in Rome writing Scripture. That's so important for us to catch. God is authenticating his spokesperson. It's the reason we should have confidence in the result.

Now go back to our passage, Acts 28, and see how this ends in verses 7 through 10, it ends at least for today. "Now in the neighborhood of that place where lands belonging to the chief man of the island, Publius, who received us and entertained us hospitality for three days." Of course, Paul had the reputation that no one else on that ship had. "And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, putting his hands on him, healed him." That is a miracle. That is not saying you better get the best cancer treatment or you better get the best infusion here, you better get the best medicine, you need an antibiotic. That's none of that. So it's hands on you praying for you, "May God heal you." BAM, it happens. That's a miracle. Breaking of natural law. It doesn't happen very often in the Bible. "And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured." Now he's curing people for three days. This is crazy. People are being cured of their diseases just by Paul laying hands on them and speaking a word. "They also honored us greatly, when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed."



Now, another thing that is not said in this text but you can be sure of, I mentioned in verse 6, there's no way he's going to go away saying, "Do you think I'm God? Well, sure I am God. Yeah, bow down to me." Paul did not do that. We already know that because of previous passages when he's considered to be a god, he says we're not a god. That's absurd. Okay? I know this about what's going on here and I don't have to have it written by Luke and Luke's already written it for us. If you were to go back east because you're in Malta now, in your mind, 60 miles, 58 miles south of Sicily, and you go back towards Caesarea, toward Israel, you're going to pass Crete and then you'll get to the little island of Cyprus. Remember when Paul in Acts Chapter 13 went to Cyprus, he also got ushered into the most important person on the island. His name was Sergius Paulus. He was the proconsul sent from Rome and he was there. And guess what he does? Not only does Paul prove that he's an apostle, but he speaks the word of God because that's what he does. There's no way he just sat there and talked about the storm or talked about ships or talked about merchants or talked about the weather. He talked about Christ because that's how he was. He went places where, "I purposed to know nothing among you but Christ crucified." I know he may have talked about other things, but he was focused on representing the truth of the gospel.

And in that, all that's going on here is doing nothing but authenticating that, which is the pattern which should leave you saying after Paul says you know what, Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament and he's coming again. They said, "We didn't know that. We know that maybe not everything that was promised in the Old Testament was accomplished at the first coming. But you're telling me he's going to come again and it's going to come with this great time of Jacob's trouble? You're going to tell me all of that? Well, that's a new revelation. How do we know you're telling me the truth?" Because you just healed my father and you're healing everybody in town. So we're going to listen to you. So his message spoken here and later written in the letters of the New Testament we can have certainty he's telling us the truth. Now, here you sit 2,000 years later and you got a Bible on your phone, on your laptop, on your tablet, you've got printed Bibles on your laps. Your Bibles are the result of the 40 authors of Scripture, the Nabi, the mouthpiece of the prophets and the apostles on which the Church is built, Ephesians 2:20, we believe and trust in God not because he's doing magic tricks for every generation. He's built the universe the way it's built so that it will keep the laws that he's made, including the laws for you to get sick and die. God never is backed into a corner. He's never having to do a miracle to get out of a jam. He can work within the laws of nature to accomplish his will sovereignly in your life and in mine. But he broke the rules and he broke the rules primarily around the giving of the truth of the gospel and the news, even in the Old Testament, that lays the law down to show us what it is to trust in Christ and to call out for mercy. All of this message you should believe in with absolute certainty, because if you don't there's no way you can have courageous endurance. You cannot endure unless you believe the truth of the gospel.

Number three, let's put it that way. You need to "Be Sure About Our Sure Word from God." And I'm giving it away there. I believe it is a sure word. And if you sit here with intellectual doubts about the Bible, you need to conquer those. Unless it's a smokescreen then it's a hopeless case. But if you're here this morning and say I would love to believe in the Bible the



way Pastor Mike believes in the Bible, that he believes it's the real Word of God given through people, that they're really God-breathed words, that "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable," I would love to have that confidence but I don't. Maybe your issue is Canonicity. Maybe you believe Dan Brown because you're easily dissuaded from reality. I don't know. Dan Brown. Sorry. Dan Brown. Dan Brown's a goofball. I mean, he is. I'm sorry. The biblical word for it is a fool, if you want to use biblical terms. Goofball, that's my equivalent. Canonicity. Maybe it's Transmission. We got books. We got a whole bookstore here. The reason we have a bookstore here is because we want you to dig deeper on everything we talk about. Right? Maybe some book on the back of the worksheet. Maybe there's a book just there that you need to say, I need to bone up on some truth related to this because I don't have the confidence in God's Word. Right? Maybe you need to read some things on predictive prophecy. Maybe you need to read some things about the Dead Sea Scrolls. Maybe you need to figure out what it is that the Bible itself is said to be given by God's inspiration, which, by the way, that word "Inspiro" that was put into the Latin Vulgate that was translated into English translations to "inspiration" means it's "breathed out by God." The authors were not inspired. That's not what the Bible teaches, right? The material is inspired. God has breathed out the words through the apostles and prophets. God spoke to your fathers and he still speaks as it's proven there in the bottom of Chapter 28 of Acts through the Prophets.

So we are studying a book that is sure. It's absolutely sure. And you ought to have a desire for it as it says in First Peter 2, you ought to long for it like pure milk of a baby wanting milk. You should desire it. You should start a new kind of commitment to God's Word this morning and say, I just need to go with a confidence like I have never had. If in fact you have that confidence, you need to be persuaded to do that. Some of you need to dust off your belief in the absolute surety and authenticity of God's Word. Dig into it. Maybe some of you... One of the best things I like about our bookstore, we have a lot of Bibles. Sometimes I just like a new season of life to start with a new Bible, a fresh Bible, get one of those ones... We got ones in there now that are like this big with margins that are bigger than the text where you can write and do all kinds of things, we even have the ones where you draw in like coloring book Bibles. It's weird the stuff they're putting out. But whatever it takes for you to every morning get excited this week about getting back into the Word of God, to long for it because you know it is sure and it's true.

Matter of fact, go to that passage First Peter Chapter, I said 2 but let's start in the context in Chapter 1. First Peter Chapter 1. Just look at the power of God's Word. If you sit here as a Christian remember this verse 22 is true of you. First Peter Chapter 1 verse 22, "Having purified your souls by obedience to the truth." How do you know the truth? We know the truth because the Word of God has been authenticated and attested through the apostles and prophets. It's been written. It's there. "For a sincere brotherly love." Maybe you love church more than you ever loved it because you're a real Christian. You love the brothers and sisters in this church. Well love one another, "Love them earnestly from a pure heart." Love like Christ. Lay down your life. Be inconvenienced for others. That's great. "Since," you are a Christian, "you've been born again, not of a perishable seed." You didn't look to a magazine. You didn't look to Steinbeck or Twain or Hawthorne. No. You did it through the "imperishable



seed." How did you get this idea? "Through the living and abiding Word of God." And now the quote from Isaiah 40, "All flesh is like grass, its glories like the flower of the grass." Right? Even the greatest of human achievements. It just comes and it goes. "The grass withers and the flower falls, but the Word of the Lord remains forever. This is the Word, right? "This Word is the good news that was preached to you," right? Paul is writing it down in his letters. Peter is now writing it down in this letter.

"So put away," verse 1 of Chapter 2, "all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. And like newborn infants long for the pure spiritual milk," we're talking about God's Word here, "that by it you may grow up into salvation -- if indeed you've tasted that the Lord is good." Here's the appeal and I'm trying to make it today. If you are a Christian, you're banking your hope on the reliability of God's Word. We talked about it last week, the promises of God. And if you are then you need to dig into this to grow up as a Christian, to be strong. Every trial you face you better have confidence in the truth of what God has said. Do you know what God says? Are you memorizing God's Word? Are you meditating on it? Are you chewing on it? That's how the Bible presents it. Like a cow chews the cud. That's the word, by the way, that describes what is translated in our Hebrew Bibles, meditate. Our minds are constantly chewing on the truth of God's word. Go buy a new Bible this morning. Right? Go buy a book that's going to boost your confidence in the veracity and the truthfulness of God's Word. Get a book on Transmission or Canonicity or inspiration or revelation, whatever you need to say am I confident the book that I hold that I call the Bible is the living and abiding Word of God. And if it is, this is what we're banking on. You cannot have, as the title of this eight-part series that wraps up our study of Acts, you cannot have courageous endurance unless you have absolute confidence in God's Word, that God has given us his sure Word.

I've been preaching on it my whole adult life. Okay? The Church has had preachers in every generation preaching on it for 2,000 years. There are hundreds of thousands of people around the world who are clinging to God's Word right now, even in places where it's outlawed. They're breaking the law to get the Word of God in their hands. This is the most important book in the entire world. It's why it's the bestselling book. It's the most downloaded book. It's the most sold book. It's the most given-away book in all of history. You got to get it. Maybe you need to buy Bible software. I don't know what you need but get yourself back into this book this week because everything we believe is based on the propositional statements of that book. Hebrews Chapter 1 says, "God has spoken to the fathers ... long ago, at many times and in many ways. But in these last days he's spoken to us by his Son." I didn't even quote the passages but Jesus sets up the same paradigm. He says to Philip in John 14, If you don't believe me for what I'm saying, you better believe me because of the works that I do. I'm breaking natural law here, Philip. What do you mean? "Show us the Father and I'll believe." What are you talking about? You've heard what I've said. I'm speaking with the authority of heaven. And if you don't believe that, look at the stuff we're doing. Don't you see it? He wants Philip to believe what he says. And what he says is he's going "to lay down his life as a ransom for many."

The only reason we know that that death on a cross 2,000 years ago wasn't just another person wrongly accused and strung up and executed by the government, because a lot of



people have been executed, a lot of people have been murdered. Right? But that particular murder, that particular murder by the envious Sadducees and Pharisees and that murder, that execution by the Romans, that one was different. That one saved you from the penalty of your sins. And how do you know that? Well, because the Bible says it. How do you know the Bible is true? Well, you should know the Bible's true because of the unique way by which God delivered it through apostles and prophets and they did things that no one else can do. These people claiming these miracles today, unbelievable. The nature and the privacy of those, nothing compared to the public out in the open, undeniable truth of the miracles that took place around Joshua and Moses, around Elijah and Elisha and the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles and Christ. These are different. These are unique. And they should leave you saying I know the Bible is true. Since God has spoken to us in his Son and his Son has brought the message that you better believe, you better repent and believe in the gospel, Mark 1:15 and 16. If that's the truth then what we should do is in our own hearts say I know this because God's Word says it and God's Word says it because it is a reliable message and communique from heaven.

Let's pray. God, we wrap up our time here. Very, very grateful and humbled, at least we ought to be, that you've said to us that as sinners we can be forgiven. People who need to be excluded can be included. People who deserve to be punished can be blessed. People who should be doubting and afraid of where we're going, we can face death with confidence. God, let us today be more confident about your sure Word, the Word that has been authenticated historically, even in the preservation of the book. God, may we have a new relationship and encouraged heart about the truthfulness of your Word. Let us never doubt it because of what you've done and how you brought it to be. To the authoritative words of your Spirit through the agency of these human authors. And you gave them a clear imprimatur. You put on them the attestation of heaven. You did things through them that made people think they were gods. And may we hear your voice in their writings because it's there, it is your voice, ultimately. As we move through the last section of Acts, a couple more sermons and onto another book of your Word, I pray that we would just love to come and to lean into the teaching of your Word and then may we go home and study it all week long. Let us go to Bible study groups. Let us gather together in our sub-congregations and small groups, may we get involved in one-on-one discipleship and dig in deeper to every part of your Word to learn your mind on paper. God, help us grow, to grow up in maturity if indeed we've tasted the Lord. It's good that we know that you're true. You're a Father to forgive us. Maybe dig in deeper, not to argue, not to be puffed up in knowledge, but to be edifying others through the love that you display, through our guided decisions that are directed by your Word. God, we commit ourselves to you afresh this morning thanking you for the death of your Son on our behalf.

In Jesus name. Amen.