



Resources for Week 6.

On
Malta



SETTLING

Qu: How do you make a Maltese cross?

Ans.: A punch in his face should do it!

No, but seriously: *The Maltese Cross formally adopted by the Knights Hospitallers of St. John in 1126, stylistically owes its origins to the crosses used in the crusades, when it was identified as the symbol of the “Christian warrior”: Its eight points denote the eight obligations or aspirations of the knights, namely “to live in truth, have faith, repent one’s sins, give proof of humility, love justice, be merciful, be sincere and wholehearted, and to endure persecution”.*

Give some thought to these 8 “obligations or aspirations”, reflecting on what they mean in your own life and walk with Jesus.

FOCUSING

Evangelist J. John, through his organisation, The Philo Trust (<https://canonijohn.com/>) published this image for Pentecost this year. Take some time to ponder each element. If in a small group, discuss how you would go about explaining to someone who did not understand the image, just what the three parts mean. If looking at this on your own, quietly be open to God and ask Him to help you to deepen your own understanding of each part, and in so doing, how they impact your life and witness for Jesus.



Read through Acts chapter 28 vs 1-10.

Paul, and all the other 275 passengers and crew of the ship were saved from the shipwreck and despite their ordeal found themselves safe and sound, (if a little wet and cold) on the island of Malta. Luke records that the Maltese people were “unusually kind” in their response to the plight of the survivors. It quickly transpires that these people were not Christians. “Christian” characteristics of behaviour are often seen in folk who do not pretend to follow Jesus. How do we account for this, and what implication might their conduct have, for how those of us who know and love Jesus, behave?

Have a look at this T.V. advert from the 1980s for the Guardian newspaper.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SsccRkLLzU>

Give some thought to the incident with the snake. (vs 3-6) Initially, as the snake wound itself around Paul's hand, the islanders viewed the incident with confident judgement, concluding that Paul must be a murderer. When Paul clearly did not fall down dead from the encounter with the snake, the conclusion changes and he is judged to be a God. Clearly there was a big potential market on Malta for the Guardian!

To be judged one minute as a murderer, who is finally facing justice, and then a little while later, be acclaimed as a God is a huge spectrum of opinion.

Can you think of instances in your own life when you have concluded one thing, but then, in the light of more information, or experience, have had to change your viewpoint?

Paul was neither a murderer or a God. You might recall that on his first Missionary Journey, along with Barnabas, the people of Lystra erroneously deemed them to be Gods.

When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, 'The gods have come down to us in human form!' ¹² Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. ¹³ The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them. ¹⁴ But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: ¹⁵ 'Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them. (Acts 14 vs 11-15)

Paul, and the rest of the shipwreck survivors, stayed for three months in Malta. During that time Paul heals the Roman governor's father as well as many of the Maltese islanders. Luke doesn't record any mention of Paul preaching about Jesus during the stay, but it would seem very odd if he didn't "take the opportunity"!

To the pagan mind, anyone exhibiting the things that Paul did must have been divine. He survived the storm and shipwreck and delivered everyone else safely ashore. He survived the snake incident. He healed the official's father and lots of others too. However, just as in Lystra, Paul would have had to explain "**We too are only human, like you**".

Consider what the impact of such an explanation might have been on the islanders, the Roman governor, the Centurion in charge of Paul, the other prisoners, the crew of the Egyptian ship.

In the bigger picture of things, reflect upon the fact that Paul was on his way to Rome to stand trial, and witness for Jesus, before the Emperor. Along with the letter from Governor Festus in Caesarea, perhaps information supporting Paul's defence might also reach the Emperor from the Governor of Malta, the Centurion Julius, and, as has been suggested, Luke's own writings, both his Gospel and Acts. How might any of these perhaps helped Pauls' case?



Pray for anyone that you know who needs to understand the "full picture" about Jesus.

Pray for those who work to share the gospel of Jesus in countries where little is known about Christianity.

Pray for the ministry of St James, seeking to share the good news of Jesus with the many, of all ages, who have little idea about Him.