

Let's open our Bibles tonight - we've got the map up on the wall. If you don't have a map of the missionary journeys of Paul (that we handed out), grab one on your way out. Ask an usher for one. There're some on the back counter as well.

The book of Acts is a thirty-year report, if you will, from the Lord as to how the early church, in its beginning, began; how the Lord spread the Word. The book asks the question - what kind of church will God use? And what kind of people did God raise up? It's a great book to learn from. It's as close to the advent of the church as you can find.

And we are in chapter 14, which brings us to the gospel going out to the mission field. In fact, coming up through chapter 11 or so, when Stephen was killed, there were lots of folks who lived in Cyprus (it's on your map there) and Cyrene as well. They ended up in a place called Antioch in Syria. It was about the same time that Peter was being led by the Lord to Cornelius' house to officially present the gospel to the Gentiles. It started with the Jews first; then it went to the Gentiles. The trade over from the Jewish believer to accepting Gentile believers - just by faith, without becoming Jews - was a big change in their practices. It took a while; for those in Jerusalem, even more so. But, in any event, the gospel went out to the Gentiles about the same time that these men from Jerusalem had gone 300 miles to the north to Antioch and began, according to chapter 11, to share with the Hellenists - those that were Jewish in background but pretty much Greek and Roman in practice. And so work got started there. Barnabas is sent by the apostles who are still in Jerusalem to check out the work. He comes there. He spends some time encouraging. The church begins to thrive. He realizes he's not a teacher. He goes over to Tarsus (which is on your map, again, over to the right there, by Cilicia). He gets Paul. He finds Paul, who has been out of commission, really out of sight for the better part of ten years; brings him back to Antioch. They teach for a year together, and then, according to chapter 13 (the first four verses or so), the Holy Spirit speaks to the church to send them out. And they begin what becomes one of three missionary journeys, which takes the gospel, really, to the known world at the time.

So, much of the book of Acts, starting in chapter 13 to the end, is covering those missionary journeys, the development of the church, the conflicts the church finds in the world - pretty much what we see today. But the lesson of the book of Acts is God is able to build the church. The Holy Spirit is the One that we need to rely on. The Word of God is what we need to share. And regardless of what everybody's turned to these days to try to make the church work, here's how God began His work - by pouring out His Spirit upon His people.

So we started with this first missionary journey. Paul's first journey covered about two years, 46-47 A.D. He then comes back to the Antioch church; goes back to serving there; stays there for about three and a half years; goes back on a second journey at about 50 A.D. - will be out for almost six years; goes to all the places he went the first time, and then beyond; comes back in about 55 A.D.; can't sit still; is back maybe three months before he just feels like, "Gosh, we gotta get out there." So, for the next three years, 55-57 A.D., Paul's out on the third missionary journey, which then he comes back, goes to Jerusalem, is arrested, and then we can end the book of Acts with his two years of imprisonment in Caesarea and an inordinate amount of time in Rome as well. And then we have to let the history books kind of take over.

So we are in the process of the first missionary journey, which is why we've given you the maps. Paul and Barnabas are sent out. They had gone to Jerusalem to bring the offering from Gentiles to the Jewish believers because there was a famine coming; and it came. The prophet had told of it. And they brought John Mark, who happened to be Barnabas' little nephew, along with them. And they set out for this missionary journey. And like I said, we've given you the maps, and you should follow along if you have one with you. If you don't, please get one because this one, I think, on the wall is going to be hard for you to see.

From Antioch, the church's home center, if you will....and, by the way, the Antioch church becomes the home for world missions for the next generation, really. Jerusalem kind of fades into the background as far as church work. But from this church in Antioch, the boys go down to Seleucia (15 miles away) to the port. They get in a boat, they sail to Cyprus. It's a 100-mile sail. They get to the religious center of Salamis. We aren't told at all what happens there. They go entirely around the island, go to Paphos, which happens to be the political center (100 miles around). They finally get a chair with a governor there, whose name is Sergius Paulus. He has a demonic, driven counselor named Elymas who tried to keep Paul

away from the governor. But the governor wanted to hear the gospel. And so God used Paul to speak to this false prophet, and the Lord strikes him blind, which convinces the governor Paul must know who He knows. He listens to the gospel. He's the first convert, if you will, of the trip. We're not told anything else that happened. And we talked a lot about sometimes when you're serving, there're just days that don't seem to make any difference, but you're out there serving anyway. And that's how God works. They get back in a boat. They sail the 175 miles to Perga in Pamphylia; it's in the Galatian region. John Mark is already freaking out, and he goes home. He quits. Paul wants to go up over the Taurus Mountains. It is believed that Paul probably had malaria. He probably should have gone home, but he's a determined guy. And so, rather than going home, they go to Antioch of Pisidia, modern-day Turkey, another 100-mile journey or so. We studied Paul's sermon ministry there (it's in chapter 13, beginning in verse 16 - the whole sermon is there). The fallout is also mentioned. People got saved; others got angry. Eventually trouble began. They weren't just thrown out of the synagogue; they were thrown out of the city and told to disappear.

They head for Iconium, 85 miles to the east, where we begin with them tonight in chapter 14:1. The city of Iconium today (in Turkey) is called Konya. It is the fourth largest city in the country. It is from here that the boys will travel 30 miles to Lystra and then 30 more miles south to Derbe, and that will be the extent of their going out. Then they'll turn around and go home, and they'll go everywhere that they were just at except for the island of Cyprus; they will sail around it, confirming the Word, confirming the saints, seeing churches planted. And when they finally get to Attalia on the coast, they'll sail the 320 miles or so home.

So we are one week away from finishing the first journey. But, again, God gives us this report so that we can learn what kind of church He wants to use. Because there's no other reason for us to read the accounts unless God wants us to look and to learn. We read in chapter 14:1 (we're going to go to verse 20 tonight), "Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed." We mentioned to you, and it bears mentioning again, all of Paul's trips - whenever he had a chance to go to the synagogue first, he did. He did that for a couple of reasons: the Jews had the counsel of the Scriptures; they had years of foundation in the Word, the Prophets. If you could get a couple of the Jews onboard, saved, the work would be moving forward quicker. You could get a quick harvest, if you will. The Gentiles, for the most part - unless they were found in synagogues here

and had been taught the Word - came out of religions that had a multiplicity of gods. None of them was the true God. So you had to start from scratch with these Gentiles. And so it was a different context. Their lives, for the most part, were stuck in Greek mythology. They required a lot more teaching. The benefit of ministering to the Greeks, obviously, was they also didn't bring with them any religious bias usually, because you could believe in anything you wanted; seemed to get by just fine. But that's where Paul begins. He begins with the Jews.

I grew up Catholic. I went to parochial school all of my life, which should explain a lot of things to you. And the good thing for me about Catholics is the Catholics have the right Jesus. He is born of a virgin, He arose from the dead, He is God in human flesh, He died for our sins. That's all Catholic doctrine. It's just then there's a lot of stuff that kind of covers up the grace of God. So they're usually, for me, easier to reach than a Mormon or a Jehovah's Witness who has an entirely different Jesus that they worship. And so you have to start with redefining who's God.

But that's why Paul, I think, went where he did. They had a lot of common ground. So we read in verse 1 that they went to the Iconium synagogue, which means there were quite a bit of Jews here. And they arrived together, they spoke the Word to multitudes of Greeks and of Jews. Notice that there's an emphasis upon how they spoke, and they "so spoke that a great multitude of Jews and Gentiles believed." The words "so spoke" stick out, right? It is the result of their "so speaking." It was compelling, it was on target. Paul would later write to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 2:1) about his experiences here, and he would write, "I did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." That's Paul's approach. Give them God's Word. Rely upon God's Spirit. And they spoke in such a way so that many in the synagogue came to know the Lord. They weren't eloquent. I don't know if Paul was extremely polished. You don't have to have an English degree with perfect diction to speak the gospel. If you know the Lord, you have God's Spirit, you know His Word, you're ready to go. You're ready to go. And Paul and Barnabas came and spoke with great love and compassion. They were sent out by the church. They

had personal conviction. We need more preaching like that. They were sharing from their hearts because it was in their hearts. So, many united in the faith.

"But," verse 2, "the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren." As much as there was a uniting in the faith, there was also a uniting in the hatred of the gospels. This word "unbelief" means disobedience. That's what the word translates as. They resorted to slander. Some other folks in the synagogue gossiped. There was innuendo. There was rumor. There's no hatred, I don't think, in the world like religious hatred. It followed Paul wherever he went. It is the battle for the souls of men. And I can just try to put myself in Paul's shoes. He's not well, he's been struggling, he's miles from home, he's out for months. And to see this wicked opposition to the preaching that would so drive even the Jews, the people that he loved, to seek to "poison the minds" - what an interesting way to put it - "of the Gentiles" (the unbelieving ones), to set them "against the brethren" so they wouldn't convert to Christ. The spiritual warfare with poisonous words. It's an awful, awful deal - what people will say behind your back. I read a story last week I thought was very interesting. In New York City, there was a couple on the phone talking about another couple in their building. And they had an electrical storm (this happened five years ago), and their private conversation was broadcast on local television. So everything they were saying, for two and a half minutes, was heard by everyone in town. And, oh man, were they feeling bad. Don't say in private what you won't say in public, I guess. But there was this undercurrent. Paul is preaching, people are getting saved, and yet there's that spiritual warfare, isn't there? And so that warfare continues. What would you think that Paul might do?

You read, in verse 3, "Therefore" (as a result) "they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands." The reaction of Paul and Barnabas to the opposition was not to leave town, which might have been our first inclination, but to just stay a little while longer - to cancel their trip plans. "We're just gonna stay a while because obviously there's a battle going on, and we want to be a part of what God is doing" despite the personal cost, despite the growing danger, besides the opposition. I say growing danger because they're about to, just down the road, kill him or try to or think they have. This isn't friendly territory. They are tremendously gathered against Paul. But he decides he's just going to stay a little bit longer, makes this choice to serve God's people. In fact, notice that you read in verse 3 they decided to stay, and they ended up staying "a

long time." Look, it can be a real hard job for you as a Christian to be a witness to your family. I know when I got saved my father was so angry that I wasted all of his money sending me to Catholic school. It was expensive for him. For three years, they didn't visit us - not on birthdays, not on Christmas. Wanted nothing to do with me. I had wasted what he had invested. So angry. Eleven years later, he got saved. But it was an ugly time. It wasn't pleasant. But sometimes you just have to be committed to staying for the long haul. And Paul stayed for "a long time." With the neighbors or co-workers or friends, it always comes with a price, it seems, and though rarely, I think, do we get asked to pay the kind of price that these guys had to pay. But sometimes you have to weather the criticism to reach people, and that can take some time. So they had opposition and a lot of it, but they didn't go anywhere because they were so confident in who the Lord was. And I think that's good for us to hear, especially if you're trying to be a witness at work, and you seem to be getting the short end of the deal. Just stick with it. God is at work. And I think sometimes when there's upheaval, that means the Lord's working. If no one seems to care, maybe the Lord's doing nothing. If there's no opposition, then you go, "I wonder how effective am I." But when there's opposition and pushback, that's usually a good time. So Paul and Barnabas just felt the Lord say, "Stay." Notice they spoke "boldly in the Lord." Their focus was on the Lord, they looked to Him for strength, their message was of His grace, and they spoke "boldly." And as they did, the Lord stood with them - the healings, the deliverance, the miraculous backed up the preaching; and God, by His grace, supported what they were teaching by doing these wonderful things that people could see.

Eventually, verse 4, "the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles." Now, after this, you would think they're going to have victory. They didn't necessarily have victory. But they eventually left people into two camps: there was the believing camp - those who received; and then there were those who just did not believe - they spoke evil of the ways of God, they actively opposed the faith. I would point out to you (in verse 4) the word "apostles." In the Bible, there are twelve official offices of apostle. You will find them showing up in the New Jerusalem, in the walls and all, and the pillars. But there is also a ministry of apostleship in the New Testament. The word "apostolic" means to be sent forth or to send off with a message. And, here, notice that Barnabas is called an apostle, even though he's not one of those twelve that holds that position as Paul would be; but he is, nevertheless, an apostle. You will find Epaphroditus in chapter 2:25 of Philippians being called an apostle as well. So

those are apostles in the ministry sense but not in the office sense, if you will. So these apostles were sent out to plant churches, led by the Spirit. So there was a siding.

And verse 5 says, "And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them," (see, I told you, you should have left earlier) "they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region. And they were preaching the gospel there." So we don't know how long he stayed - "a long time" - and eventually everyone had an opportunity to make up their minds. But the opposition was violent against the gospel. There were Jews involved, there were Gentiles involved, there were rulers involved - to kill or to hurt the apostles. This was an out-of-control lynch mob supported by the government, if that brings any news to bear on your heart. I mean, the government is here promoting the antagonistic behavior against the believer. So our ministry duo escapes. God delivers them. They could have been caught and killed. They get out. They're smart. They don't want that to be an issue. They go 30 miles, roughly, from Iconium south to Lystra. Derbe is about 30 more miles. It is one of those rare times where we will find Paul, on these journeys, in a small town. He's usually in the big population centers. That's the way he ministers. And let the church just kind of reach out like umbrellas, if you will. But here he's in a small town with a small population, off the beaten track. In fact, if you look, historically, these little towns were seen as backward, illiterate, very superstitious towns, kind of in the back woods, away from city and training and schooling. That's the way history portrays these places that Paul finds himself. Now, there's no mention of a synagogue here, which would mean there were less than ten Jewish men in this city (because else they would build one). And they headed for this very remote area. But notice, in verse 7, it didn't matter. They continued doing what they had been called to do - to go share the Lord, to go preach the gospel. I'm sure that John Mark was at home, and if he got news, he, "I told you it was dangerous. I'm glad I got off the bus when I did."

In any event, there in Lystra, when they arrived - and, like I said, 30 miles down the road - verse 8, "And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked. This man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, 'Stand up straight on your feet!' And he leaped and walked." So, they move down the street because there're people wanting to kill you, 30 miles away (in Costa Mesa, now you're in Whittier). So, he starts to preach

again, small town, and there's a guy that everyone knows - he's been crippled since he was born. I'm sure everybody knows his name. And the Lord, by His Spirit (as Luke is writing), draws our attention to this man in the crowd. I like the fact that Doctor Luke wrote the book of Acts. He is very capable of, and gives a lot of attention to, describing medical maladies that God healed. So it's nice to get a doctor's opinion of the healings of the Lord, and he documents these healings for us. He tells us here that, as Paul was preaching, he caught this man's gaze and that the Holy Spirit, discerning in Paul's heart, told him that this man had a faith to be healed. And, in the middle of preaching, Paul stops, and he turns to speak to this man in the presence of everyone, and he, right on the spot, says, "Get up!" He said it loudly, not hidden, not superstitiously. He just took authority, if you will, and spoke. And right on the spot this guy leaps up, and he begins to walk. Remember the man in the Temple a few chapters ago. He also leapt up. There seemed to be this excitement. And he is healed on the spot.

I must admit to you that healing is something I do not fully understand. I know that, and I believe, God heals. I know He heals today. I had a friend who was completely blind who the Lord gave 20-20 vision back to. We know him personally. I had a friend who broke his arm (with me, riding motorcycles in the desert) on a Friday night; he was healed on a Saturday night. Completely. The break gone. I saw it with my own eyes. He wasn't the most spiritual guy. I don't know why God blessed him so. But there you go. (Laughing) I don't know why God heals some and doesn't heal others. I don't know why it seems to be the worst of people that sometimes get delivered while those who are the godly suffer. I don't know what it was in this man's countenance that would have said to Paul, "Tell him to get up!" I don't know what he saw in his face that Paul concluded God wanted to do a work. I don't know if it was just something that the Lord showed him in a spiritual sense. I'll tell you what I do know. I do know that it is wrong to say that God desires everyone to be healed and that if you're not healed, there's something wrong with your faith. I know that's wrong. I can give you biblical reasons for that. It's the error of the modern-day healing ministry. It is the philosophy of Job's counselors. "If you were doing everything right, you wouldn't be suffering as you are." The LORD described Job's counselors as "darkening counsel with words without knowledge" (Job 38:2). That's how the LORD described them. So I know that that's wrong. And it's true when we try to fully explain what God has chosen not to fully explain to us. I know that when we talk about healing that oftentimes faith becomes the focus; like, "Did you trust the Lord? Did you pray in faith? Do you believe God?" And that turns out to be the focus. And I guess to some extent

that's all right. But it isn't something that very often you'll run into in the Bible where you go, "Well, he didn't have enough faith." "These go out by prayer and fasting," (Matthew 17:21). But, "O ye of little faith." We can certainly grow in our trust in God. But yet if you were to say to me, as these healing minister people that I used to hang out with would say, "Bro, if you just had enough faith, you could be healed." And I got mad after a while and said to them, "Look, since you know so much about this, would you pray for me? Because apparently you can trust God that I can't. Would you intercede?" When my wife died of cancer in her 20's, I had someone say to me, very sincerely, "You should have trusted the Lord more." I went, "All right. I think you're wrong." But, I mean, it's a typical kind of an outlook that you find in people's lives. And then, just being a Christian who wants answers, I don't know how much faith Lazarus had to be raised from the dead. He was dead! It wasn't his faith. Or the lame man at the gate with Peter. He didn't have enough faith; he just wanted a handout. "Look at me," Peter said. "No. Just give me some money. I'm busy." He didn't expect to hear, "I don't have any money, but I'll give you what I got." So, a grain of mustard seed is very small, and having that much faith, I can move mountains. So I'm suspecting that all of us are less than grains of mustard seed, even at our best.

So, here Paul focuses on the sufficient faith of a lame man in a very idolatrous town, and he perceived "he had faith to be healed." My next question - because this is how I read the Bible - then why wasn't he healed already? If "he had faith to be healed," why wasn't he healed? And I think the answer is faith can become inactive or passive or, if you will, not acted upon. Faith, in the Bible, is always an active verb. So you can, "I trust God." I trust God to get me a job, and then I don't go out and look. That's faith that's passive, it sits by. Right? I believe God can save my wife or husband, but I don't share with them. That's inactive faith, it's passive faith. Your belief, until it acts, can't do. So faith needs to be encouraged and activated, which is not un-unique in the Scriptures. You'll find that everywhere, where we prefer to wait and see, a lot of times, to our own detriment. But faith is something that can be encouraged to be active, which I believe is why, when the Lord says to us (James 5:14), "You that are sick, call for the elders of the church, let them lay their hands on them, anoint them with oil, and the prayer of faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will raise them up," I really believe that is no more than an encouragement to us to put our faith into action. I guarantee olive oil or rubbing alcohol or 30 weight - whatever you put on your head to pray, whatever oil you're using - doesn't heal. But God heals. So you get to do something in faith, acting in belief, and God is able to meet you at this point of contact.

Laying hands on the sick is a point of contact. I think there's something to be said for that. God does not want us to sit idly by. Passive faith isn't productive.

In any case, this awesome work of God that He had been continuing through these men now finds Paul, moved by the Spirit, to identify a man that he believes, as God speaks through him, is ready to stand up and obey the Lord. It's a powerful kind of evangelism, and you certainly want these gifts of the Spirit in your life. But I can't explain to you what Paul saw or might have seen. It's in my file under - when I get to heaven, I'm asking God to explain a lot of verses, and this is ..... by the way, the longer I'm saved, the bigger the file becomes. I started at 18 thinking I knew everything and then it started to do like this (Pastor Jack spreads his hands to indicate the expansion of a file full of questions).

Well, the Lord raises him up, and everyone knows him. It's a small town. Verse 11, "Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, 'The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!'" No. That's what Jesus did. The God. The God. One God. Verse 12, "And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because" (he had a neck scarf, no) "he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes" to these two men. So this man leaps up. There is understandable hysteria in the place. This is a superstitious, idolatrous place. And let me give you a little background. I think it'll help you in the Scriptures. Fifty years earlier, the Latin poet Ovid, in "Metamorphoses," wrote about an ancient legend that took place in this area. It was a well-known written work. The supreme god Jupiter (who would be Zeus in Greek) and his son Mercury (who would be Hermes in Greek) had come to the earth, according to this poet, in human form, looking for the recognition of the citizens of neighboring Phrygia (which is just another county near where they were). The result of these gods coming to look for recognition among the citizens was that no one showed them kindness but one couple, whose names were Baucis and Philemon. And the legend said that the gods angrily destroyed everyone in Phrygia with a flood except for these two who recognized them, who were turned into trees and placed at the entrance to the temple of Jupiter. Everyone in town. It was a well-known, well-believed miracle. They believed in it, and they determined that if the gods would ever come back, they weren't going to miss them. So imagine with that being written less than fifty years earlier (in the country). Now here comes a guy that he gets a guy up off his feet who has never walked in his life and just commands him to get up. And people go, "Uh oh. They're

back! We'd better not miss them, or we get destroyed too." And so, with that kind of a superstition, and notice that, in verse 11 and verse 12, they focused on Paul - what he had done, he was the main speaker - they just saw the individual. Right? They didn't look to the Lord. They looked to Paul. I don't know if you've ever run into religious people who see the picture of Jesus in a garage door or a screen or, "I saw Him in a cloud." Focusing on whatever it is. They're very uneducated in the Scriptures, very superstitious. But the temple of Zeus, which would have been Jupiter, was right in front of the city. So these guys, the priests, go, and they're going to come and worship because, "We're not going to miss out. We recognize who you are." They even chose who would be Zeus and who would be Hermes.

Well Paul and Barnabas are in a dilemma now. The last place they wanted to kill them; now they want to worship them. "But when the apostles," verse 14, "Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out and saying, 'Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.' And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them." Paul and Barnabas are freaked out. If the Jews learned anything, it was idolatry doesn't work with God. They learned that in Babylon for seventy years. So they come back, and they're grieved. There's blasphemy and sacrifice. And Paul and Barnabas, maybe for the first time, are facing the most difficult test of all - the praises of men. More difficult and more dangerous than snake bites or shipwrecks or stoning. The honor of men can derail you permanently. Whenever God begins to do a glorious work through your life, be careful that you give Him the glory. Because people will want to worship the instrument rather than the Lord, the creature rather than the Creator. And that's what they find themselves at now. They find themselves in a dilemma. We have that same dilemma - you and I. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). You've got to do your ministry in such a way that you reflect the goodness of God but that the credit goes to Him when all is said and done. Not, "Yeah, aren't I great, aren't I faithful, aren't I usable?" No, no, no. In a way that God gets the glory for the things that happen in your life. So, fortunately, Paul and Barnabas didn't want any part of this at all.

I don't know if you know the story of James Cook, who discovered Hawaii. He landed in Kealahou Bay. The natives, when he came in on the boat, thought he was their god Lona. And so they wanted to worship him by giving him gifts and giving him the island women, which he was just more than happy to accept. Except there was one very jealous husband who didn't like it and hit him in the head with a club and killed him, and down he went. And he said, as he killed him, "Oh, gods don't bleed." And old James Cook bled a lot. So welcome to Idol Worship 101, buddy. Herod did the same thing, right? He wanted to be worshipped as a man who spoke like a god, and he died of his worms.

Well, these guys are in the same difficulty. But our boys do the right thing. So they cry to the crowd, as loudly as they can, "We're just like you guys. We have the same passions, the same nature, the same difficulties." What did James say in chapter 5:17? "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours," just like us, "and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months." So, "We're not gods at all. We're just men like you, and we're here to tell you about the God who's alive. He's unlike all of your false, dead gods and your stupid ideas of what you're giving homage to." Paul is an interesting guy because he's flexible in evangelism. Here with the pagans he doesn't preach the Law, he doesn't talk to them about Prophets. He talks to them about like passion. "You're just like I am. You want what I want. I want what you want. We're goin' through the same thing. God has a work that He wants to do in your life. He's been good to you even though you haven't acknowledged Him. He's given you food and clothing and rain, and He's brought gladness. He's fed you by His grace." But he's not diplomatic because Paul is straightforward. He calls their gods vain, useless. "You're worshipping useless gods. My God's been really good to you! But your gods are worthless." In fact, he says in verse 16, "God could have wiped you out in any generation; could wipe all of us out as He did in the days of Noah or in the days of Lot. But He patiently waited as the fruit of idolatry and the error of your ways captured your life." So God, verse 17, waited. "He blessed you despite the fact that you were not blessing Him, and He watched over you." And with all of the words that Paul could muster, he stopped the worship service. Right? And I suspect, and it certainly bears out from the last two verses here, that the people were very embarrassed. "I'm bringing my prize cattle to slay for the gods who've come to the earth, and you're telling me not to do it. Now I look like a fool or like an idiot." And so they were upset because they thought they were exercising faith and discernment, and they walked away hearing that their gods were useless. So, what turned out to be glorious - the healing of this man and

testifying to this town - turned out to be a riot in town, and they had to work hard to avoid it.

About that time, verse 19, from 30 miles away in Iconium and, for that matter, from Antioch, which is 85 miles away (this isn't where they began - this is Antioch in Pisidia) - so, from 115 miles away come these men who not only hate Paul but they will travel this far to be sure that they can stop him from what he's doing. So we read, "Then Jews from Antioch" (85 miles away) "and Iconium" (30 miles away) "came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead." Imagine being so bitter against the things of God that you would travel from here to San Diego on a donkey to try to kill a guy for preaching the gospel. That's what they were doing. And there wasn't just one or two; there were all kinds of folks. And they picked up some more people at the rest stop there in Iconium. And here comes this mob. They're not satisfied with rejecting the truth; they want to tear it up. They don't want you to preach. They don't want to reject what you're preachin'. They want you to be rejected. And it becomes personal. They found the townspeople very fickle. Twenty minutes earlier they were on their knees in front of them; now they were able to persuade them to kill Paul. But, no doubt, like I said, they saw the healing. They refused the worship. "If they're not gods, then they're evil. They're evil spirits." I'm sure that would have been an easy sell because no one does that to people who are lame. And so, with all of that floating around, they take Paul, they stone him, and they drag him out of town, and they leave him for dead. Now, being killed by stoning is a horrible thing. Imagine how he must have just been pummeled. And he's not well.

We read in verse 20, "However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city." What are you doing?! "And the next day" (when he had gotten some rest) "he departed with Barnabas" (a little further, 30 more miles down) "to Derbe," the end of the run. I don't know what the saints were doing around Paul's body. I don't know where the saints came from, if they came from Iconium, if people had gotten saved in town. We're not given much of a story. We just have what we have. That's all we're supposed to learn from. So, they gathered around, and I'm going to presume that, wherever they came from, they were praying for Paul. Maybe they traveled with him. It is possible that Timothy was in this group. I mention that because if you go to Acts 16, you'll read, "When we came to Derbe and to Lystra, we found a disciple there named Timothy, whose mother was Jewish, his father was Greek. He was well spoken of in Lystra and in

Iconium." So this is Timothy's hangout. On the second trip that Paul is going to take in about three years, they'll pick up Timothy as a helper, as a servant, as one who will be with them for years to come. It could have been he was a believer already because it does say in the letters that Paul wrote to him that from a kid, he'd known the gospel (2 Timothy 3:15). So, this young man might very well have been there and watched who would become a guy that would become his disciple-maker, if you will; watched him get almost killed and left for dead. I don't know if the people were crying or praying or mourning or trying to protect him. I don't know if Paul was really dead. Paul didn't know if Paul was really dead. In fact, if you read 2 Corinthians 12, Paul will write in verse 2, "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago - whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows - such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man - whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows - how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." And Paul writes about this experience which we, no doubt, believe took place here when he was just left beaten up.

As a result of these revelations in heaven, Paul says (in 2 Corinthians 12:7), because of the abundance of insight that God gave him as a result of this experience, God allowed him to have a thorn in the flesh. We can discuss what the Bible might say that it means, and maybe we'll get into that sometime, but I would just say this - whatever he got, I think that he got it as a result of this stoning; that whatever his thorn in the flesh is in the years to come, it came as a result of the beating that he took here. In fact, he will write to the Galatians (which happens to be this area he's in) in chapter 6:17, "From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." He writes that to these guys who beat him half to death or tried to stone him. So, Paul got some stuff here. Right? He went through some stuff here. He would write to the Corinthians, "I was struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:9). I don't know if you'd really want to go on a missions trip with this guy. He's ready for bear.

So he gets up, knocked out, unconscious, dead, I don't know. But he gets up. And he goes back in town looking for....."We'll leave the light on for ya".....a hotel. And he spends the night with somebody in town before the next day, after having died the day before, making a 30-mile journey to Derbe. Which tells me that here's a man who is driven by the Spirit of God. And if you ask yourself, as you read through the book of Acts, how do you stop men like this? - the answer is you can't. You can't. How can the world stop the church? It can't. Most of us would have

quit by now. Look, he was chased out of Antioch. They plotted to kill him in Iconium, and he escaped. They left him for dead in Lystra. John Mark bailed out and left the two of them on their own. He's sick as a dog. And this is just the first trip! This is the "easy" one of the three.

I always walk away from these portions of Scripture saying the safest place I could ever be is right where God wants me to be, even if it's tough. Because here's a guy that was right in the heart and in the center of where the Lord wanted him. But toughness will weed out those that aren't called.

Before we have communion, let me run a couple of Scriptures by you. You don't have to find them tonight, but there's a story in Jeremiah 26, and I just want to give it to you as an illustration. It's a good chapter where the LORD says to Jeremiah, "I want you to go stand in the LORD's house, and I want you to speak out against the nations of Judah as they come to minister here to the LORD. And I want you to speak these words to them. I don't want you to diminish a word." And the LORD gave him some pretty rough things to say to the people of Judah (at the time), being the prophet of the LORD. And so he lays them out there (you can read them in the first sixteen verses or so), and they're just tough words. I mean, they're just hard to hear. And when he is finished, the people come to him, and they say to him, "We're going to put you to death because you're speaking like this to us. And we don't want to hear this from you. We're going to pronounce death against you." And Jeremiah said, "Well, do to me whatever you want, but God told me to tell you this so I'm tellin' you this. And then it's up to you whatever you do, and it'll be up to Him to take care of me." And they decided to leave him alone. Frightened them enough. In the same chapter, there's another prophet towards the end of the chapter (chapter 26 of Jeremiah) whose name is Urijah. He also had a message from the LORD, and he went and spoke it. And the people reacted in the same manner, "We're gonna kill you and chop you up and send you packin'." And they threatened him with great destruction. And he freaked out, and he ran for his life. He didn't really believe what he was doing, I guess. And they caught him and killed him. And he wasn't delivered like Jeremiah was. This guy, Urijah, went down in a heap.

So Paul and Barnabas - they stand the heat because they trusted in the Lord, and they were assured of His calling. The question, if you read the text that we read tonight, is - well, if the Lord delivered him from a plan in Iconium, why didn't the Lord deliver him from a stoning in Lystra? Why? When Paul wrote to Timothy his

last letter before he died, he said in chapter 3:10 (about this time) these things, "But you have carefully followed my doctrine," he says to Timothy, "manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra - what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me." In Paul's mind, getting away from a certain stoning in one city and being able to survive a stoning in the other was the same thing. "God delivered me out of them all." Sometimes God delivers you from it. Sometimes God delivers you through it. Paul, looking back in his older age, saw them as one and the same thing.

So, we'll leave Paul there in Derbe as he runs for the last city. He'll be at the end of the rope there before he turns around and goes back. But two weeks from tonight, if you'll read ahead, we will retrace all of his steps with him, look at the fruit that has happened over the eighteen months or so that he's been gone, and see what the Lord left behind before they go home. And we'll conclude this first missionary journey with them as we finish this chapter. All right?

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
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