

Let's open our Bibles tonight to Acts 14:21. We're going to continue our study through the book of Acts. We have a map for you. I think that we'll put it up behind us. Oh, it's already up? Never mind. We have copies of the trips of Paul in the back if you're new or you didn't get one or if you've lost yours. We think it's helpful to see how far he traveled, how long he spent in various places. The more you can kind of get a visual, I think, the easier it is for you and me to understand what's going on.

The book of Acts is roughly thirty years of history, post-resurrection. By the time Paul begins his missionary journey, we've gone through fifteen years of that thirty years. So, from chapter 13 forward, there's roughly another fifteen years or so of Bible history. It's important to us because it's the closest to God's beginning of the church. It teaches us what kind of church that God would want, what kind of people God would use; and as such, this is a narrative for most of the text, other than the sermons. So, unlike reading through the epistles - where they're heavy and they're theological and they're doctrinal, and you have to think through principles - the principles in the book of Acts, like much of the gospels, are laid out in narrative; which means you get to view a report that God gives you and draw the right, hopefully, conclusions from what He teaches us. So, especially with these missionary journeys of Paul, to see how God saved and who God used and what they faced, it's a great book to know better what, maybe, the Lord expects from you and me in our generation as well.

Well, we skipped the 4th of July. I hope you had a good Wednesday. It was weird not to be here on a Wednesday night. I was mixed up all week on what day it was. But I want to go over just a couple of minutes with you - I'll just run you quickly up to verse 21 where we'll start tonight. Paul and Barnabas and John Mark were sent forth from the church in Antioch in Syria (on your map that's on my left but on your right there, kind of up in the corner - Cilicia area). It is 300 miles north of Jerusalem. The ministry there began with the scattering of the saints after Stephen was murdered. Some men - Hellenists (those who maybe grew up Jewish but they adopted Greek cultures) - went there and began to share about the same time that Peter went to Cornelius' house to officially bring the gospel to the Gentiles, which was God's will to begin with. In any event, as the church began to

grow, Barnabas was sent to check it out. He ministered there for quite a while, went and got Paul who had been really out of the limelight for probably thirteen-fourteen years from when we first found him getting saved, brought him to the church. He began to pastor there. They taught for a year, and as they were ministering, this church in Antioch becomes the center for world missions in the 1st century. Jerusalem just kind of fades to background, for the most part, and this church becomes the active, working church that you find in the book of Acts. From this place, Paul will take three missionary journeys. God, like I said, will teach us much about how to reach our generation. I should just tell you - because we'll run into it time and time again - that it does seem that God's best plan for reaching the world is through planting churches; not just for sending missionaries but actually raising up churches in various areas, anointing or raising up elders in those areas and then letting them reach their area around them. Paul, for the most part, went to large cities, mobilized lots of people, if you will. Every parachurch organization that exists today relies on the church to survive and relies on the church to be successful. So that's really what we're going to run through, through the rest of the book of Acts, starting in chapter 13:1 where the Lord spoke to the elders in Antioch and said, "Send out Paul and Barnabas," and they did. And they took John Mark with them (Barnabas' nephew) - a training guy. And so we've been going over their trips. In fact, tonight we will finish the first missionary journey.

For a quick two-minute review, they left the port city of Seleucia, which is on the coast. They went there from Antioch (it's only fifteen miles or so). They got in a boat, they sailed to Cyprus - the island - offshore, 100 miles away. They went to Salamis, which was the religious center of the island. They went to the synagogue, where they ministered without any effect (as far as we know). We get no real report of reaction. They traveled around the island, another 100 miles or so, till they ran into a fellow who was the proconsul or the governor of the island, a guy named Sergius Paulus. He was a man who wanted to hear what he had been hearing about, what these men were preaching. There was a sorcerer named Elymas who was a helper, a counselor, if you will, to the governor. He tried to keep Paul and Barnabas away, but Paul got frustrated, and the Lord said, "Speak to this man," and the Lord blinded this man much like He had blinded Paul. And so that action, plus the hearing of the gospel, led the first man (at least on the trip) to the Lord - this governor. And that was pretty much the report of I don't know how many days or weeks they may have spent on the island. This was a two-year trip, about 1235 miles or so by the time they get back home again. From there, they sailed to Perga

on the Pamphylia coast, if you will; it's about 175 miles. John Mark, who'd only been with them touring the island of Cyprus, has already decided this is too much. So he packs up and goes home; leaves these two men by themselves. There is every indication to tell us in the Scriptures (especially the book of Galatians) that Paul had malaria or at least some kind of illness that was really detrimental to his travel. For them to go over the Taurus Mountains into Galatia was a long trip of 100 miles of completely dangerous, kind of outlaw roads. They would end up in Antioch of Pisidia. They did what you will find on almost all of Paul's travels - they went again first to the synagogue, which gave them an immediate opportunity to share with people who had biblical roots. And so if you could get a quick response - salvation to the Jew first - indeed he would go there first. They were asked to share at this synagogue. Luke tells us that Paul got up to speak, and he records the first sermon from the road, if you will. And you will find that sermon in what we have just recently covered. But it is a sermon very similar to Peter's, very similar to Stephen's, very similar to all of Paul's other sermons. It almost always included a history of Israel; Israel liked talking about itself. There was always a proof to the divinity of Christ in the presentation. There was ultimately the death and the resurrection of the Messiah to prove who He was. And it always ended with an invitation to faith in Him. They were invited to stay. The initial response was positive. They spent the next weeks in between service times speaking a lot to the Jews and to the proselytes, those who had been converted out of Gentile religions and idolatry and had been coming to the synagogue. And the crowds began to grow. It says that they spoke to them about the grace of God, the forgiveness, the mercy of God. The next Sabbath the place was packed, and the leaders were angry - angry that so many people had shown up for service. They began to oppose them. And so Paul eventually turned to the Gentiles. And we are told there, in the end of chapter 13, that many of them returned to the Lord and began to seek God. The Word of God was spreading like wildfire.

There was soon a campaign to expel Paul and Barnabas from the region. The boys kind of dusted off their feet, as the Lord had told them earlier on, and they traveled to Iconium (85 miles to the east), where they arrived, and they were filled with the joy of the Lord. They immediately did what we're learning now - they went to the synagogue first. They were able to stay for quite some time there before the unbelievers got organized. So there was fruit. There was a period of time that passed. They sought to stone them, but they got away. If you want to read the book of Acts to be a missionary, you'll probably get convinced not to be one because it's a pretty hard life that these boys chose to follow. By God's

grace, they heard about the plan; they got out. They were able to travel to a place called Lystra, which is 30 miles to the south and then southeast 30 more miles to a place called Derbe, which was kind of the end of the line for this trip out. In Lystra, there was a man in the crowd (as Paul was preaching) who Paul sensed by the Spirit's leading, that he had faith to be healed. We spoke a lot about that when we went through that portion. In discernment, he tells this man to get up and walk, and the man indeed got up and walked. It so moved the people in Lystra that they were sure that these boys were the gods come down to visit them (being idolaters and all). Paul and Barnabas' adamant refusal to allow them to worship them, though, left the people embarrassed. First they wanted to worship, and then they were going, "Oh, man, we're so dumb." And so they felt bad, if you will. Additionally, from Antioch (which is pretty far away now) and from Iconium (85 miles away), those who had been offended by Paul when he was preaching there came all the way to this city to try to call for his life. And because these people were embarrassed, and these other folks were pretty loud and influential, they compelled them to drag Paul outside of town and stone him. And they believed they'd killed him. They just left him outside to die. Miraculously, Paul got up that night. Probably Timothy (a young man that we'll see on the second missionary journey) who lived here was probably in the crowd. He had known the Lord, at least been raised in the Lord. Paul claims him as his own. So we don't know at what point he got saved - some time in this ministry. But in any event, Paul went back into town, got a place to stay, went out the next morning to Derbe where we begin in verse 20 of this chapter. And that's kind of where we left them after two weeks. Derbe was, like I said, the last stop of the first missionary journey. They would go back the way that they came - visiting and revisiting the works that God had begun. Like I said, they were gone two years. So it could have been a year and a half of travel and then just six months on the way back. We don't know for sure. But that's about the timeframe that he had. And then he goes back to Antioch in Syria, his sending church, to give a detailed report to the people who had been praying for him and to the church to whom he was accountable. So this journey - two years, 46-47 A.D. - and then Paul comes home.

So tonight we just wanted to finish off the travels, if you will, from verse 21 down through verse 28, to just kind of look at what kinds of things were involved in planting a church.

We are working on planting a church in Nashville. We have been working with some families that have moved there from here. We are going to do a satellite campus

on Thursday nights for a while. We're going to use some technology, and we're going to put it on the radio there. We have a following of people that listen to us. We find that Nashville is filled with big churches that you don't necessarily have to bring a Bible to. In fact, there're a half a dozen churches that are larger than 5,000 people, and no one brings a Bible. So we feel kind of moved by the Lord to go teach the Bible. And if it all works out, we're going to send teams from our church there every month to do live services and just see what God might want to do in teaching and getting the Word out. So you can keep that in your prayers. It's kind of in the works now. We'll see how that goes.

But this kind of addresses that whole issue - the idea of how did Paul go about establishing a work early on in the life of the church? What did God have in mind so that, by the end of thirty years, Paul was able to say (Colossians 1:6), "This gospel's gone throughout the world, it's gone everywhere"? We can't say that. But he could.

So let's start in verse 20 tonight as we continue. Hopefully, that'll give you (I know it's real fast) some kind of a feel for where we're at. "However," verse 20, "when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe." This was after he was stoned to death or left for dead. Verse 21, "And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.' " I can only imagine Paul (Paul is in his 40's, early 50's maybe). I don't know how stoning leaves you looking, but I can't imagine it's good, and yet the next day he's traveling 30 miles on foot or on horseback or something to go to the next city to preach. He might have said, "Time out, I've got to go to a hospital." But Paul, beaten and all, is so determined that the Word needs to get out that, for him, there was no question that, "We're going to continue." Fortunately, at least reading the context here, when they get to Derbe (the last stop), it was like the mountaintop experience of the whole trip. There was no persecution, there was no anger, there was no opposition. There wasn't much fighting. In fact, they appeared to have stayed there for quite some time, the way it is written. Fruit seemed to be falling from the trees. God was blessing His Word and the servants there. And so this was this, "Ah, finally," beautiful place of rest, and the persecutors who had been following them either abandoned their quest (thinking they'd killed him) or they just figured, "Well, he's learned his lesson now; we don't really need to do any more.

Now we're 100 miles from home. We'd better go home." And so whatever the cause was, they were just left alone. They were able to preach the gospel without opposition. And notice (in verse 21) that many people responded and that they were able to make disciples out of many people as well. So not just getting saved, they helped them to grow in the faith. So that's going to take some time. They weren't there for a week. You know what I'm saying? It took a long time for this to develop and to work itself out. In chapter 20, later on in the book of Acts, we're going to run into a fellow worker of Paul's named Gaius (verse 4 of chapter 20) who lived in this town. And he will join Paul and Timothy, and then he will join them on the next trip out from Lystra as well. So they at least found a guy that, if he got saved here, is going to be a guy that's going to be with them for years.

Notice (in verse 21) that their preaching was the gospel. The gospel just means good news. Right? And we only know one good news to preach that will always work. The word "preaching" means to say something out loud or to herald or to declare. "Kerusso" means to (like Caruso, the singer) shout out what you know to be so. So, it should be no surprise, I guess, that the gospel of Jesus needs to be loudly declared by the saints if we're going to bear fruit. Now maybe that sounds redundant to you, but there're a lot of Christians who truly believe silent witnesses work. I would tell you silent witnesses don't work. Silent witness only works to support your mouth and what you say; else you're just nice and quiet. And that doesn't work. And if you think it works, just ask Joseph of Arimathea how it worked. Or just ask Nicodemus how that worked. It didn't work at all. An example without a message is no message at all. You can't just let your light so shine; you've got to speak up and support what you are living and why you're living that way. So, as Christians we want to be open books, but we want to share what God has done, and the good news has to be told, heralded, proclaimed to the lost. You want your friends to get saved? Tell 'em about Jesus. At some point, speak up. It's not good enough to just go, "Well, I'm goin' to church. Got my Bible. Hope you see me goin'." "Why are you goin'?" "Oh. I gotta tell you now." Good news requires telling - boldly and constantly. And it requires a response. The good news is pretty clear. Jesus came, God's Son, to redeem sinful man at the cross, to offer forgiveness, a new birth, atoning death, eternal life. It's pretty straightforward. I don't think it requires a scholar to come up with all the understanding. But they went and preached the good news. And then, having seen people get saved (or responded), they then set about for this second task - this idea of discipling many. Preaching saves; teaching educates. And once you get saved - once the gospel is heard, and you get saved - now you need to grow. Preaching is for the lost;

teaching is for the saved, for the believer. Preaching is done primarily by the church, outside the walls of the church (most of the time). I mean, there are evangelistic meetings and stadiums. But, for the most part, even, I think, if you'll think back to your salvation, somebody ministered to you probably outside the church. You may have come to the church and said, "I'm going to get saved now." But mostly, preaching is done outside the church whereas teaching is, for the most part, done inside the walls of the church. We have new believer classes regularly just for people who have just gotten saved to get started. "What do I do now? How do I study my Bible? What kind of Bible do I need to get? And how can I begin to grow?"

So notice that, when it comes to the narrative of what God began to do here in Derbe, left alone, they preached the good news; seeing the fruit, they began to teach the saints about the things of God. There are a lot of churches who make the mistake of preaching too much to the saints. I don't know if you have gone to one of those churches, but I have a lot of friends who came out of churches that told me they got saved every week. They'd go forward every week. And when you're a kid, you go forward every week because, "I don't want to mess up. I'll go again." After a while, you start saying "hi" to the guys up there because you're all up there together. It can be a problem. On the other hand, some places never, ever preach at all. God would have us to share our faith but not be spiritually immature twenty years later because we haven't learned the Scriptures. And maybe I'm singin' to the choir. You're here at a Bible study on a Wednesday night. That's pretty good. Praise the Lord. I'm glad you've made that decision.

After some time in Derbe, and we don't know how long this honeymoon lasted (because compared to everything else, this was gravy - I don't know if they ever decided they ever wanted to leave here; maybe build a house here), but, in any event, they felt the Lord told them it was time to go home. And so all we're told is verse 21 - the goodness, the blessing, the rest. If you go to the map again and look at where Derbe is, if you go (on your map) to the right to Cilicia and Tarsus, there's a pass (and there was a pass in the 1st Century) called the Cilician Pass that, had they gone just to the right or the east, they could have gone around the little horn, and it would have been, by far, the quickest way back to Antioch. They would have been there in a couple of days rather than what they endeavored to do instead. So, it was the easiest route, it was the quickest route, and they'd been gone almost two years, and yet they don't feel the obligation to go and take the easiest route. Paul would never say, "I'll take the easiest route." It seems to me Paul took the

hardest route. It wasn't a trip of comfort for him; it was a trip of love. And he was dedicated to seeing God's Word get out.

Now they had left behind (if you go through these chapters - a couple of them here, 13 and 14) these infant churches. Some of them were probably just a small group of people; others might have been more. And Paul thought it was absolutely essential that he go back to see how they were doing. The problem is - by going back, he runs right into the teeth of guys that wanted to kill him, laid in wait for him, chased him 100 miles across town, were wicked and angry and bitter. And yet he felt responsible for these folks that he had led to the Lord. God rarely gives us, I think, an easy road in serving Him. I think you'll discover - who does God use? - He uses men and women that are devoted to Him, who are willing to make personal sacrifices. We have plenty of people in our church that I'm just so blessed to see, and I watch them over the years; and they just serve without fanfare, without acclaim, without needing to be acknowledged. They just love the Lord; it drives them. We also have plenty of people in our church that talk about doing that and never do it because it's too much work, it's too much effort. "I've got my own life to live." And to be honest with you, I can't do anything for you. I just know that God would have more for you to do if you are willing to do that. Some people serve when it's convenient and not too costly. Man, Paul, he's been sick, he's been beat up. I don't know if the scars have healed or the gash in his head from the rocks in it. I don't know how he physically is, but he doesn't say, "Let's go east and go home, I'm whooped." And we'd all go, "Good job, buddy! Glad you didn't die." He said, "Let's just go back." And aside from going back to Cyprus, the island, where it seems there was very little fruit, he goes everywhere except there. He goes everywhere, just retraces his steps. On the second missionary journey, Paul will go back the other way - will go in reverse order before he then launches off to go where he'll end up in Europe.

So, it takes devotion, I think, to serve the Lord. In fact, it is that very truth that it costs you to serve the Lord that Paul and Barnabas will leave as his final message to these churches, and you can read that in verse 22. Because it says they went back to these cities, "strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.'" Imagine Paul and Barnabas walking back into trouble, walking back into hatred, walking back into the difficulty that they were able to finally escape from - the physical threats - for the sake of a few saints in town. They were worth it to God. They were worth it to Paul and Barnabas. No wonder God

bleses - when people say, "I wish we could have what we have in the book of Acts," I always try to remind them, "If we could just find some disciples that were like this, we might very well have what we have in the book of Acts." These guys didn't know any bounds or any limits. Right? They just knew that they had to give their all, and you certainly find that time and time described in the narrative that becomes the book of Acts. It is a far different cry from the approach that traveling evangelists take in our day. Nobody in particular in mind, but there're a lot of traveling evangelists who will come to town for the weekend, hold very large well-publicized meetings at large venues, give emotional appeals, take very large offerings, and say this to you, "See you next year about this time." They don't care about the church. They certainly don't care about you. They're growing their ministry, not growing God's people. And it's tragic. But that's the same argument that we have to give to people in local fellowships. We live in a part of the country where there're a hundred good churches you can go to here. So if you don't like someone or don't like something, you can run to the next church. And if, two years from now, somebody ticks you off there, you can go to the third church. And by the time Jesus comes, you won't even have made all the churches. So you're not obligated to work out problems, you're not obligated to swallow your pride, you're not obligated to forgive, you're not obligated to grow up spiritually. But you can just kind of be on the run. But Paul's devotion to these individual fellowships was such that he was going to stick with it. So, Paul and Barnabas were men that God used to preach the good news, to plant churches, to multiply the flock. But they were also shepherds, and they cared about the flock. And so they want to retrace their steps. I think it's an amazing decision. I don't think John Mark would have survived this. Back to the danger, back to the rejection, back to the violence for the love of the new believers. They wanted them to be strong in the Lord. And maybe my question to you might be - in terms of that, who do you disciple? Who looks up to you for their spiritual well-being? Who do you get up and pray for in the morning and call during the week and take responsibility for spiritually? Or does someone have to do that with you because you can't stand on your own two feet? So there's this time to grow, and then there's a time to do. Right? To go forward. It ought to be to us a lesson that ministry development and church planting takes a lot of diligence and a lot of devotion and a lot of sacrifice.

I like Barnabas, and I just want to point him out to you because it seems to me, again, in the narrative that God gives us, here's a guy that's totally committed to the ministry and yet he seems to get none of the glory. He never gets to speak, unless he's just sharing in small groups. He also didn't get stoned, I guess. But it

must have been a comfort to Paul to have a guy at his side that was just convinced liked he was. He didn't get the persecution or the accolades, but he was there every step of the way.

So verse 22 tells us what their plan was in going back to these churches. They wanted to strengthen the souls of the saints. They wanted to exhort them or, if you will, speak to them encouraging words to continue to walk by faith, to hang in there, because this was not an easy place to walk with Jesus. And their message was, "It's not going to get any easier. You're going to walk with the Lord in this life, you're going to have some difficulty." Paul and Barnabas sure preached a different message from the material prosperity doctrines of today, the health-and-wealth people that seem to do so well because who doesn't want to be well and healthy and rich? So those are doctrines that are very powerful. We were in the Philippines back when Marcos fell, and the number one growing church in the Philippines was a name-it-and-claim-it church because that's what everybody wanted. So, look at this. You're in your Bible. Set that against what Paul and Barnabas were preaching in the first missionary journey as the Word of God goes out to the world, and the message was, "Yeah, it's gonna get tougher. It's not gonna be easy to walk with the Lord." Jesus said (John 16:33), "I'm telling you this that you can have peace. In the world you're going to have tribulation; you be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." The religious freedom and the ease we enjoy in America, even to this day, is not typical of the experience of the believers in the world. No one has it as easy as you do. There are people in prison and persecuted and hiding. We have a family member who has been a missionary in China for years. The underground church in China is growing in remarkable ways. But just don't get caught in one. And yet that's their ministry. So we have it so easy. It's hard for us to talk somebody into going to church during the week because there's something on TV they don't want to miss. It's a long way from that to, "Hey, man, you're gonna go through it walkin' with the Lord." The road to the kingdom is not an easy road. Jesus said so as well (John 15:18), "If the world hates you, it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you. But because you're not of the world, I've called you out of the world, that's why they hate you." The Lord sets the stage and says, "Now go out there and be a witness." You go, "Yeah, but they hate me." "Yeah, I told you they would." It's not an easy place to minister, not if you're following His lead. And the words of Jesus are not cultural in the sense that their statements only applied to His generation. No. They're applied to every generation. In fact, I would say to you if you're not being persecuted for your faith, you're probably too quiet. Because it

seems to me it almost comes with the territory. You start telling people, "I'm a Christian, I believe in Jesus," you're probably gonna catch it someplace, especially as the world gets more loud and boisterous in their opposition to just about everything holy. So, what did Jesus say there in John 12? "They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (verse 43). That wasn't Paul and Barnabas. The young church needed to be strengthened to make their commitment to Jesus sure. They needed to be exhorted, to be encouraged to action. We need that, too. The opposition is fierce, the hatred is strong, and Paul says, "Come on, man. You're gonna have to live by faith to make it through." You should know, if you don't know, that Christianity was not a popular religion in the 1st century. It was scorned and looked down upon. It wasn't applauded, it wasn't supported, it wasn't financially beneficial to be a Christian or to try to make your living working the church. They hunted Christians down. The majority of Christians in the 1st century were mistreated and persecuted and rejected. When Paul writes 2 Timothy 3 (the letter that he writes to Timothy), he references this first trip that he makes, and he lists a whole lot of things that they suffered through. And then he said, "I know that if I'm going to desire to live a godly life in Christ, I'm going to suffer persecution" (verse 12). That was his mindset coming out of this trip. "I know if I'm gonna do it right, it's not gonna be easy."

So, there's no easy life in serving the Lord. Especially in this world. There're distractions and competing interests and fleshly excuses and lack of passion. But these guys were committed. If you want to ask yourself, as you read through the book - who does God use? - the answer is those who are sold out to Jesus and will pay the price to be used. It's just the way it is. No way around it. It'd be great if we could not pay the price. I don't know how to do that.

We're told in verse 23, "So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. And after they had passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. Now when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed." Paul and Barnabas went back, and their one goal was this, "Let's go to the churches that God is raising up," (the church just being believers that gathered together) "and let's find leaders who can be responsible." And so, with prayer and with fasting and with the desire to know God's heart, they went to these various groups, they tried to determine (ordain is really the word for chose), and they chose whom God had made clear to them. They followed the same

pattern that was followed when they were chosen - fasting and praying (the first three verses of chapter 13). And so, practically now, you go into this place. You've been there for a while. You hear from everybody else, "This guy's really shown himself strong. He's a leader. Okay, let's pray for him. He's gonna be the guy now." And you have to say to yourself, "Do you think they were right in every case?" And my answer would be they probably weren't. I'll bet they laid hands on the wrong guy sometimes. But here's what they did. They sought to know God's heart - that prayer and fasting. That's about it. Right? "God, show us." And then when they left (because they couldn't stay forever) they planted churches, they commended them to the grace of God. "Here, we'll just leave you with God. And God will fix this or alter this or bless this." I don't know. But at some point you have to just make a determination and then leave it with God. And that's exactly what they did. We can train, we can teach, we can disciple, we can encourage. But at some point, you're just gonna have to go, "All right, buddy. Swim or sink or fly." Are you always right? We've been involved in some clunker works that didn't work out at all, and I've got it on my list to ask the Lord, "How come that didn't work out? I thought you told us to do that." I'd love to tell you I was always right, but even my wife doesn't believe that anymore. (Laughing) So, I love the picture though. They went back to every town. They prayed, "God, show us." They laid hands, they ordained, they chose who they believed God had chosen. Then they moved on. "God, You handle it." And to the best of our ability, we try to find out what God has done.

Finally (notice verses 24, 25 and 26), we get this quick itinerary of their travel back home. Notice that Pamphylia and Pisidia (on your maps) are regions in Galatia; they are provinces like Orange County, L.A. County, if you will, if that'll help you at all. They're listed kind of in round there on the map. Back over the dangerous Taurus Mountains, finally they came to Pamphylia, and notice they came to the city of Perga, which was kind of the launch-off point - the place they had come when they came the 175 miles from the other side of Cyprus. Now, reading forward, when they got to Perga, Paul didn't stop. Never stopped in the city. Just blew right through there and headed out of town. That wasn't a place he felt led to stop. But he did on the way back. And so we read here in verse 25 they "preached the word in Perga" before going down 20 miles or so to the coast of Attalia to get on the boat to go home and then return. This was the place John Mark had left them; like I said, a place that he had decided not to share at all. So they forego going to Cyprus. We conclude there wasn't much to go back to Cyprus for.

I think we talked when we started in chapter 13 - sometimes when you start off in ministry, you expect God to do everything, and then you're out for several months and nothing happens; and yet you believe God put you there. I think Paul and Barnabas had that same experience running around Cyprus. It was Barnabas' home town, if you will, home island. He will also go back there when they break up, his and Paul's next trip, and Barnabas will get to go minister there.

But over the last two years, having left Antioch in Syria, I think not a day had gone by that they weren't being prayed for. And when they come home, here's the best kind of relationship you can have with your missionaries - you have a church that you can be accountable to and a group of people that will pray with you. There're a million things going on in your world, but this is your world, this is your responsibility. And so they get on board, and Paul will come back and share and, for the next three years, he will stay in this church teaching before he'll go out again. But this time when he goes out, he's going to travel 2700 miles, and he's going to be out for six years; and he's going to go everywhere he went this time, except for (again) Cyprus, and then he's going to get dragged across the continent before he comes to the ocean, and God says, "Come to Europe." And then that whole ministry in Europe begins for Paul as he crosses the Aegean from Troas to Philippi, which is also on the map as well.

So they went home. They went home. They told the church (notice from verse 26, important verse, I think) they came home from the place that "they had been commended to God's grace." "God's grace go before you, the Lord help you." The same way they left the elders behind. And then it says "for the work which they had completed." And I point that out to you because they came back home, and having done what they did, according to what we've read in these two chapters, this is what God had in mind. Right? This is the work that God gave them. They came back two years later. They completed the work. Were the plantings of the churches completed? No. But was the planting what God wanted them to do now? It was. And so if you want to say - what does the Lord want? - I think from the standpoint of God's strategy for us reaching the world, church planting is still the right way to go. Send out pastors, send out local people who will minister. Go plant churches, and hand them over to indigenous people who live in the area and have a heart for the people that are there. The church came together. They get to hear. I'm sure that Paul, after two years, did not look as good as when he left. He'd been beaten up and knocked around. And you think he looks bad now, wait till he comes back from his second journey or from his third. It seems that their testimony did

not focus so much on the suffering, which is what I might have wanted to talk about, but rather the glory that God had set before them an open door. Because we read (in verse 27), "Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles." It seemed to be a very positive report though it could have been filled with lots of negatives. Verse 28, "So they stayed there a long time with the disciples." And we know that he was going to be there for three years, until 50 A.D.

Imagine being in this church, and these guys come back, and you're in a little town, and yet Paul stands up, and he goes, "Yeah, we were in Cyprus, and this magician guy got in our face, and the Lord blinded him. And the governor, he gave his life to Jesus. And then we went to Iconium, and there was a plot to kill us, but the Lord showed us, and we got out of Dodge. And then we came to the Antioch place, and we got to preach in the synagogue, and a lot of people were saved. And we went to Lystra, and God healed this lame guy. And then they wanted to worship us as gods, but we said 'No!' and man, then they got mad and tried to kill me!" That would be kind of a fun deal to listen to him, wouldn't it? "And then we went to Derbe, and, oh, I want to build a house in Derbe. It's the best place ever."

So, a time of rest (verse 28), recovery, and, like I said, they'll be there for two to three years before going out in 50 A.D. for his second journey. The soon-coming problem for the next two years (and it's one that we're going to deal with in the next chapter) is that there was already this brewing (because of the Gentiles being saved) that the Jews began to be angry, even saved Jews, that if people were going to come from idolatry to Christ, they should always just pass through the right religion - the Jews. They should go from a multiplicity of gods to believing in one God. "Once they believe in one God, then we can introduce them to Jesus." Once they were circumcised, once they kept the Law, once they did whatever they were supposed to do, then they could come to Christ. And so these Judaizers, as the Bible calls them (and they weren't just unbelievers, they were a lot of believers - James probably part of them at the time, the apostle, the head of the Jerusalem church), were the most slow to come around to the grace of God that Peter had learned, let's say, as the Lord ministered to him. But there was this brewing in the church so that even the Judaizers began to go where Paul had been. "Where was he at? Was he at Derbe? Okay, let's go to Derbe and go tell the church there that, hey, Paul has it all wrong. And let's go to Iconium, and let's tell

the church that Paul's got it all wrong." And he began to be hounded by these guys and not just where he'd gone; in Jerusalem itself where the church had begun.

And so in chapter 15, it kind of all comes to a head, if you will, and there's a meeting called together to address only one thing - what does the grace of God really mean in terms of salvation? What does grace involve? What does it look like, and how is it applied? So Paul's going to have to take a trip 300 miles back and 300 miles back again with his buddy so that they can go testify. And it'll be Peter's last kind of showing up in the book of Acts. He'll come testify what had happened with the Gentiles and him so that the church can get on the same page and say, "Okay, this is how God saves" before he goes out for his second journey. So chapter 15 is going to be, for the most part, involved with or surrounding, if you will, the decision of this conference; and then, beginning in verse 36 of chapter 15 (next chapter), we'll go out with Paul again on the second journey.

Verse 26, I want you to remember that. God's completed work, I think. This is what God intended. Missions should be God's will, and it should be primarily involved in planting churches. I say that to you in regards from a pastoral leadership standpoint. Our board of directors, as well as our pastors - if we have a certain amount of money to invest in missions, we're going to put the money first towards church planting before we will a parachurch ministry that exists to help the church. In other words, our greatest investment will be in people that are wanting to go start churches or help them to do that. And here's why - they completed what God wanted them to do. Led by the Spirit, supported by the local body, they took a trip out, they went to Galatia. And, by the way, by the time Paul left here (in chapter 13), there wasn't any church in Macedonia, Achaia, Asia, Galatia. There was no gospel going anywhere. By the time these fifteen years go by, till you get to the end of the book, there are hundreds of churches, literally hundreds, planted by one guy. And some band of merry men that God has used him with as they go out. If we follow the details of this trip, God said they fulfilled His will, then His will is preach the gospel, disciple believers, plant churches, leave elders, and go home and report of your behavior. And that should cover any missions statement.

Let's end in verses 22 and 23 and 24 for a minute, or maybe just 23. Here're three elements that show what takes place after the preaching of the cross begins to bear fruit. Number one - verse 22 says that they began to teach them. Apostolic instruction. The Word of God is taught. That's extremely important. I would hope

that if you've been a Christian for a while, you can make a good biblical argument for the deity of Christ or for the doctrines of God or for the need for the cross or of the rapture of the church or the coming hope that we have. I mean, that's just teaching, it's instruction. Second of all, verse 23, they needed pastoral oversight. I think leadership is indispensable in the church. God is very structured. When you read about Jesus taking people through the Bible, it always says He started back with Moses, then He goes through the Prophets and through the Psalms and all, and He takes them through the Scriptures. He's very organized. I think sheep need shepherds. There is a qualification list in 1 Timothy 3, in Titus 1. The shepherds are to feed and lead the flock. It doesn't mean they're any better than anyone else. It's just a calling that they have that they should fulfill. And, thirdly, you need God's favor. Notice at the end of verse 22, we talk about with tribulation entering into the kingdom of God, God will finish what He starts. And it is this plan that the Lord will follow as we go through.

So Paul goes on despite injuries, and because he pressed on, he gets a greater harvest. The gospel of Jesus has to be loudly proclaimed. There's a tremendous need for teaching in the church. Serving God in this wicked world is going to bring you a lot of tribulation. Your message to others should be that you should encourage them to hang in there. We should be, as a church, very supportive of church plants and world evangelism and mission strategy. And we should all care about that. How are we going to get the Word out? God gives us a certain amount of time to get that done. So let's do that well.

Next week, like I said, read the first eleven verses. I think we'll stop at verse 11. But we're going to go through this conflict over grace versus works. It's the definitive Jerusalem Council, and we need to see that it got stuck right in the middle of this great outpouring of God's Spirit.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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