

## **Barnabas - Volume 2**

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### **Preface**

This second volume looking at the life and ministry of Barnabas will consider the remaining details of his first missionary journey with Paul. The details of the first part of this journey recorded in Acts 13 have been considered in Volume 1, and we come in this current book to look at the details of Acts 14.

This book was written to accompany the *Sound Words* radio programmes which examined the life of Barnabas in detail. Those programmes enjoyed the valuable help of Ron Low whose sermon notes on Barnabas served as the basis for the series. It was good to work with Ron again and I am indebted to him for the help he gave us as we studied and recorded those programmes together.

Derek French  
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## **Chapter 1: Barnabas and Paul at Iconium (Part 1) - Acts 14:1-6**

Having been ejected from Pisidian Antioch at the end of Acts chapter 13, Barnabas and Paul travelled to Iconium, a journey of around 90 kilometres, and the first six verses of Acts 14 provide us with the details.

### **1) In The Synagogue.**

We read in verse 1 that:

*“Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue.”*

#### **a. They served the Lord together.**

Here we see Barnabas and Paul having fellowship in the gospel. Remember the wise words of Amos 3: 3:

*“Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?”*

There can be no doubt that Barnabas and Paul were agreed concerning the content of the gospel, the importance of the gospel, and the power of the gospel, so they had this unity of purpose together. You may recall when Jesus sent forth his followers in Luke 10:1, that he

*“...sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go.”*

There are several reasons for this approach. First, by going together they would be both a help and an encouragement to each other. In the Old Testament we have some helpful instructions in the book of Ecclesiastes 4:9-10:

*“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work. If one falls down his friend can help him up!”*

In addition, two men would reinforce the truthfulness of the message they brought. This would have particular significance for any Jewish contacts they would make because in the Old Testament for anything to be valid there needed to be at least two witnesses who agreed. We find this in Deuteronomy 19:15:

*“A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”*

Indeed, there are many other examples in the Bible of two people working together – such as Peter and John in Acts 3, Paul and Silas in Acts 15, Timothy and Erastus in Acts 19 to name but a few. There can be little doubt that fellowship in the gospel means sharing, supporting and strengthening each other in this great and glorious work. If you know and love the Lord, it should be your constant desire and delight to see the gospel spread abroad in the world. So, when we are engaged in such a work from our local Church, it is very profitable and proper to work

alongside others, so that by the company and encouragement of each other, the work will progress.

### **b. They spoke about the Lord.**

In the opening verse of Acts 14 we see something of Barnabas and Paul's fervency because it tells us that they went into the synagogue and:

*“There they spoke...”*

This means that Barnabas and Paul considered sharing the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ of paramount importance. This was the one thing they had to get across to lost sinners. We can illustrate it like this. If we have received news of information which is very important and essential to a group of people, then not only what we say, but the way we say it will help the listener 'take in' the information. A Biblical example of this is seen in the life of Jesus. You will recall that Jesus visited Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles in John chapter 7. On the last day of the feast we read in verse 37:

*“Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink’.”*

In those words of the Lord Jesus we see his fervency for the gospel because he stood and spoke in a loud voice. You see, the good news of the gospel is not something to be kept to ourselves; it is to be proclaimed not feebly but earnestly. Now the greatest incentive to experience this

passion for the gospel is when the gospel has gripped our hearts and lives. It is only when the gospel really means more to us than anything else in life, when we have known and experienced its life-giving power and wondrous transforming work, that we will have an eagerness for the spread of the gospel. Another place where we learn of Paul's zeal for the gospel to be shared as widely as possible is in Romans 1:14-16 where Paul wrote:

*“I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”*

One cannot but be impressed by the apostles on the day of Pentecost who, when filled by the Holy Spirit, proclaimed with great enthusiasm the gospel of God concerning Jesus Christ, who had been crucified in that same city of Jerusalem a few weeks earlier. We read in Acts 2:14:

*“... Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd...”*

If there is a message worth telling, then we must preach it with eagerness, for the gospel of God's grace is the greatest news which man can hear. So we need to ask ourselves if we have a similar concern for the gospel to spread. Is the gospel like a burning fire within us which must be released so that it will consume the sin and wickedness and unbelief

all around us? Or are we ashamed of the gospel, ashamed to be known as believers, ashamed to be identified with the people of God and the Lord Jesus Christ? One Christian hymn writer was Isaac Watts and if we are as concerned to spread the gospel of God as Paul and Barnabas were, then the words of one of Watts' hymns will be true of us. This is what he wrote:

*“I'm not ashamed to own my Lord, or to defend his cause, maintain the honour of his word, the glory of his cross.”*

## **2) The response they received.**

We have already seen in earlier studies (see Barnabas Volume 1) that those who attended the synagogue were not only Jews. They were also joined by serious-minded Gentiles who desired to know more about the great God worshipped by the Jews. With this in mind it is rather thrilling to read in Acts 14:1 that:

*“...a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.”*

The gospel of Jesus Christ produced much fruit as many came to trust in him. Indeed, this is something we should look for every time the gospel is shared with people. Just as in the natural world, the farmer expects to reap what he sows, so when the 'good seed' of the gospel is proclaimed, we should look for fruitfulness in the lives of those who hear it. Remember what the Lord said through the prophet in Isaiah 55:10-11:

*“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”*

God has a glorious purpose in the proclamation of his word, and that purpose will be realised and not thwarted by Satan’s or man’s wickedness. Though often men do mock the gospel of Christ, Paul wrote in I Corinthians 1:21:

*“For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.”*

Here again we see God fulfilling his promise in that when the gospel is preached, there will be fruit in that the Lord will “*save those who believe*”. Now in this city of Iconium, Barnabas and Paul were faithful in proclaiming the gospel, and it pleased the Lord to grant a spiritual harvest because “*a great number*” of Jews and Greeks believed. Here we see the universality of the gospel to meet the needs of all types of people because it reached both Jews and Gentiles. A Gentile is anyone who is not a Jew. The Jews were those who had received God’s laws, and the Gentiles were those who were outside the Jewish fold, but not beyond the reach of God’s love and mercy. We must note that in Iconium

*“...a great number believed.”*

When God is pleased to bless the preaching of the gospel, he can do so in such an abundant and generous way that all we can exclaim are the words of Psalm 118:23:

*“The Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes.”*

The question for Christian believers is, do we long to see the Lord do similar things today, even using our individual witness? If the good news concerning Jesus Christ has transformed your life and mine, then surely we must long to proclaim this gospel with great zeal, and look to see the Lord bring forth fruit from it. Remember too, that one may plant, another may water but it is God who makes it grow (see 1 Corinthians 3:6).

### **3) The rejection that came.**

We read in Acts 14:2:

*“... the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.”*

We have observed in our earlier studies of the life of Barnabas, that when the Lord was pleased to bless his word, then Satan often stirred up opposition. This is seen again in this incident at Iconium. Here we see not only the determined ill will of the unbelieving Jews, but also their

extraordinary influence upon the Gentiles (non-Jews). But observe against whom this opposition was focused. It was against the brothers, that is the new believers, comprising of both Jews or Gentiles. These unbelieving Jews *“poisoned their minds against the brothers”* and against the gospel which they had believed in, which was an attack on Christ himself. You may recall the words of the Lord Jesus to his disciples before he was arrested and crucified in John 16:33:

*“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

We have never been promised an easy path in the Christian life, neither should we expect no opposition when the gospel is preached to men and women. Satan and his evil forces will ensure there is hostility against the gospel; but let us not become ‘fearful’ in the Lord’s work, for the promise of the Lord Jesus is, *“I have overcome the world.”* We have the most wonderful and joyful news to tell to sinners that Jesus saves. Let us then go forth with this glorious message and see God transforming the lives of many through his redeeming grace.

## **Chapter 2: Barnabas and Paul at Iconium (Part 2) - Acts 14:1-6**

Barnabas accompanied by Paul were at Iconium. As they shared the good news about Jesus they met both considerable success because many people believed and also considerable opposition as the unbelieving Jews opposed them. We take the details up at that point and which are recorded for us in Acts 14: 3-6:

*“So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders. The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. There was a plot afoot among the Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to ill-treat them and stone them. But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country.”*

Now it might have been thought prudent for Barnabas and Paul to leave Iconium with such opposition around, but they persisted.

### **1) The Determination They Exercised.**

This is clear because we are told that they spent a considerable time in Iconium. They did not turn away from their God given task even though the opposition was

fierce. Barnabas and Paul were adamant and fearless as they continued with the work of the Lord. They spoke the word of God with boldness - that is freely and frankly. They were not timid or cowardly because they relied on the Lord and his authority and they persevered in their labours for him.

The Lord honoured their faithfulness and (v3):

*“...confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.”*

The Lord was vindicating his servants and the preaching of his word. Now whether these ‘signs and wonders’ were external like healing, or internal bringing many to the new birth, they were carried out by the will of the Lord who enabled Barnabas and Paul to accomplish them. This was so that those who heard the preaching of the good news about Jesus would be convinced of its truth and that this good news was from God.

The challenge for us from all of this is that if Barnabas and Paul could show determination in the midst of outright hostility and opposition, then we should also. Not all of God’s children are called upon to face such fierce foes, but we can so easily make excuses for not telling others about the Lord Jesus for the least little thing. We must remember that the ‘good news’ concerning the gospel has been committed to us, so we must persist and share it with others.

## 2) The Division That Continued.

The opposition they faced did not go away. In fact the whole city was divided with some siding with the unbelieving Jews and others with Barnabas and Paul. This was a classic example of the effect the gospel has on men and women. The word '*divided*' used in verse four means rent or split. Sadly, whenever the good news about Jesus is shared it has the effect of dividing those who hear it into two groups, those who welcome and receive it and those who do not.

Now we should note something that is said about Barnabas at this point because he is described as an apostle (v4). Nowhere else in the Bible except in this chapter is Barnabas called an apostle. That term is normally used for the twelve disciples and Paul, but Barnabas is never numbered amongst that special group of men, so we are left with the question as to its meaning when this verse applies the term to Barnabas? The word literally means 'a sent one' and in the light of what we read in Acts 13:3 that Barnabas had been sent out by the Church in Antioch on this missionary journey, it really means he was a missionary or minister sent out on special service. You may remember that in order to be considered amongst the special apostles (the twelve and Paul) the person had to have met the risen Lord Jesus (Acts 1:22) and there is no record of that ever happening to Barnabas.

Returning to the opposition he and Paul were facing, this question arises: is this opposition something we should

expect whenever the gospel is preached? Or even more importantly, is this what the Lord has said will happen when his word is declared? The answers to these questions are found in Luke 12:51-53 where Jesus said:

*“Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”*

Here the Lord Jesus Christ clearly states that his coming to the earth would cause division. The Bible commentator William Hendriksen has written this about these words of Jesus:

*“Faith not only creates division between one race and another, one people and another, one church and another; it even brings about division in the family, in fact often the sharpest division of all. In this connection Luke here mentions 5 family members...  
...Because of the relation which these various members assume towards Christ, there is intense friction between them: “three against two, and two against three.”*

So as God’s Word is preached today this division occurs. Some are on the Lord’s side because they have recognised

that Christ is the answer to their every need, but others are on Satan's side, still holding on to their sins and sinful ways and refusing God's offer of mercy. Sadly, even in some families today this division exists and some are the Lord's and some are not. That is never easy when it occurs. What we need to ensure is that we are on the Lord's side and not Satan's, and do all we can to encourage our loved ones to follow Jesus for themselves.

### **3) The Departure Forced Upon Them.**

The fervent and fruitful ministry exercised by Barnabas and Paul was brought to a sudden end by a violent and vindictive uprising by the unbelieving Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers. It is very interesting that Gentiles and Jews were normally antagonistic towards one another and yet here they were united against Christian believers. There are many examples of similar unlikely 'partners in crime' in the New Testament such as Herod and Pilate (Luke 23: 12) and the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 16:1) who opposed Jesus himself. Sadly, from the time of Christ to the present day, if the Church's enemies can unite for its destruction then they will do so.

At Iconium a plot was made to abuse and stone these two servants of the Lord. News about this reached Barnabas and Paul, so they were facing a serious dilemma. What should they do? Should they stay or should they depart? It would seem, in reading through the Acts of the Apostles that the Lord guided his servants when to stay and when to move on. And so, here in Iconium, as the threat of abuse

and stoning grew – stoning remember resulted in death - Barnabas and Paul wisely departed and fled to Lystra and Derbe. It really was a mercy from the Lord that they received the information about this plot to kill them before it took place and they were able to take the appropriate action.

We need to remember that what happened to Barnabas and Paul at Iconium was not unexpected because when the Lord Jesus sent out the twelve apostles in Matthew 10:33 he warned them of persecution.

*“When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another.”*

There was nothing in their fleeing which spoke of terror, or undue care for their own safety, but rather they expressed discretion which prompted them to retreat before the danger overtook them. On other occasions they would stand and stay and face danger, but on this occasion they were able to escape and did so.

The sad outcome for the city of Iconium was twofold. First, God’s chosen servants were no longer wanted by the unbelieving Jews and Gentiles because they had rejected the message of the gospel. Yet this was the message these needy people desperately needed to bring them God’s forgiveness and eternal life through the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, the new believers (both Jews and Gentiles) would not have the benefit of Barnabas and Paul to encourage them in the things of the Lord. However, we do know that

God would not fail them nor let them go and this would no doubt help them to trust in and depend on the Lord even more.

There are times in our lives when the departure of others can be looked upon by us as either desirable or dreadful. For example, perhaps you were converted under someone's ministry and when they passed away or moved to another church you felt the loss dreadfully. When that happens we need to remember that though God's servants may have been moved on, the Lord will never leave us or forsake us and he is well able to continue to speak to us through the Bible and uphold us. On the other hand, if you are an unbeliever and have sat under a gospel ministry for years, you may have been glad when the minister moved on, since you would not have to listen to his fervent pleadings for you to come to Christ. Then you need to realise that although God permits the departure of his servants to other places that does not mean you can avoid or escape from him! If you persist in rejecting him and refuse to repent of your sins and place your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, then one day God will call you to give account of your actions to him and you will have no excuse. Remember that the Bible tells us it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31). Then do not waste any further time by refusing to trust in Jesus, and turn to him now while you have the opportunity. He will welcome you and pardon you, so do not delay.

## **Chapter 3: Barnabas and Paul at Lystra and Derbe (Part 1) - Acts14:6-7**

Because of the opposition to the gospel and violence planned against Barnabas and Paul by the unbelieving Jews and Gentiles, they fled from Iconium. We are informed in Acts 14:6-7 the course of action they took:

*“...they...fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country where they continued to preach the good news.”*

The Roman province of Lycaonia was an inland area of Asia Minor, lying between Phrygia, Galatia, Cappadocia and Cilicia. Lystra was in the southern part of this province around 40 kilometres south of Iconium. Derbe was east of Lystra and southeast of Iconium (approximately 28 kilometres from Lystra.) And so we see that the mission field they entered were these two cities and the surrounding region lying between them. Undoubtedly the Holy Spirit who called them to make this missionary journey in Acts 13:2 directed them to this new area where they should serve the Lord. It is clear from the reading of God’s Word that those who desire to love and serve the Lord will be directed into the type of service and to the right people which he has chosen for them.

We need to remember that while not every Christian believer is called by God to make the kind of missionary journey Barnabas and Paul made, it is essential for every follower of the Lord Jesus Christ to be aware that there is a

‘mission field’ in which they should enter and work. It may be you have to bring God’s Word to those in your home, your neighbourhood, your school or college or your place of employment, but that is the ‘mission field’ for you. And should the Lord move you to some other area of activity, then labour for him there with all the enthusiasm and zeal he gives you.

### **1) The Method They Used.**

Arriving in this new region we discover the approach Barnabas and Paul took this time was no different from before because they continued to preach (v7). When we consider that it was the preaching of Barnabas and Paul in Iconium which resulted in them having to flee for their lives in the face of violence, we cannot help but come to the conclusion that preaching about Jesus is something very significant. The reason is that this is God’s appointed means to make his message of salvation in his Son known. When we read of Barnabas and Paul preaching we are reminded how the herald of the ancient kings would come into a city with the glad tidings that victory had been won over their enemies. His task was to announce or proclaim the good news. Now it is a wonderful fact that God has been pleased to use sinful men, whom he has saved with the precious blood of Christ, as his heralds to ‘preach’ or ‘proclaim’ the glorious news that he has triumphed over sin, and death, and hell. All who receive this message and repent and believe on the Lord Jesus will be delivered from eternal punishment. Those who are called to preach have been called to the greatest and highest and most noble

calling ever bestowed upon sinful man. In later years when Paul wrote his epistles he regularly stressed the importance of ‘preaching’. For example in I Corinthians 1:17 and 21 he wrote,

*“For Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the gospel...God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.”*

When he sent his letter to the Galatian Churches we read in Galatians 1:23:

*“The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.”*

He gave his own testimony also when he wrote to the Church in Ephesus. Ephesians 3:18 says:

*“Although I am less than the least of all God’s people, this grace was given me, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”*

Then again in Philippians 1:18 he wrote about some who even preached Christ from wrong motives:

*“But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.”*

The lesson is clear: the method they used to impart their message was by preaching. We are living in a day when

all kinds of ways are being employed to get the message across to people, but we must never deviate from the God given method prescribed in Scripture, namely, preaching. If God ‘spoke’ when giving the law to Moses and the children of Israel, and if God’s prophets ‘spoke’ his word to the people, and if the apostles and servants of the Lord in the New Testament ‘spoke’ or ‘preached’ his word, then so must we. This is not to say the Lord will never use any other means, because we know at times he does. An example would be someone who became a believer through reading the Bible or a Christian book. But the main emphasis of the Bible is priority is to be given to preaching.

## **2) The Message They Shared.**

We are told “... *they continued to preach **the good news.***” Our word ‘gospel’ means good news. It is obvious to an observant reader of the New Testament that the message they fervently believed, was also a message they were prepared to suffer and even die for, and it was a message that occupied the most important place in their lives. Now what is ‘the gospel’? It may be described in its simplest terms as the ‘glad tidings’ from a Holy God to sinful men. Various terms are used to describe this gospel. For example in Acts 20:24 where we read of “*the gospel of God’s grace.*” In Romans 1:1 it is the “*gospel of God.*” And in verse 16 of that same chapter the gospel is called “... *the power of God.*” Then in 2 Thessalonians 1:8 it is described as “*the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” While in 1 Timothy 1:11 it is “*the glorious gospel of the blessed*

*God.*” And finally in Revelation 14: 6 “*the eternal gospel.*” When we consider these descriptions of the ‘gospel’, one thing is very clear, namely, that ‘the gospel’ is of divine origin. It begins and ends with the triune God.

Something else which is very important to note is that this gospel is not proclaimed to angelic beings, but to men and women, to sinners, to those who have broken God’s law and are under condemnation and who face eternal separation from God. And the Lord has a very specific purpose as the content of the gospel message makes clear. Consider the opening words of 1 Corinthians 15.

*“Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”*

Here we find that the gospel concerns ‘*our sins*’ and that ‘*Christ died for our sins*’ according to the Scriptures. That is, his death was in accordance with God’s purpose and plan set forth in the Old Testament Scriptures. Not only did Christ die, ‘*he was buried and rose again.*’ This ‘gospel’ is preached in order that listeners may receive the gospel and be ‘*saved*’.

Then there is the description of the message found in 1 Corinthians 1:23. In the first part of that verse Paul declares:

*“...but we preach Christ crucified....”*

Here again we see that ‘the gospel’, the good news of God’s rescue plan for sinful men and women is all about the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ. It is in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that the ‘good news’ is understood and clearly seen, for the price or penalty for sin has been paid. The sins of all who will believe have been atoned for. God’s justice has been satisfied, and believing sinners are redeemed and saved. And this is all down to the grace of God.

One further example is found in Galatians 1:6-9:

*“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned. As we have already said, so now I say again, If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!”*

Here in unmistakable terms Paul declares that if anyone preaches any other gospel he should be accursed. In truth, there is no other gospel, but only man's attempt to formulate something of human origin. Sadly many want a gospel that is man centred and not Christ centred. So they produce a false gospel which satisfies human ego, produces human response, but which cannot give eternal life nor grant assurance of eternal glory. And the challenge of this for us coming directly out of the example of Barnabas and Paul when visiting Lystra and Derbe, is that we also should preach and proclaim this same gospel to the people we meet in our world today.

In closing, reader, can I be personal and ask, what about your response to this gospel? Can you say like Paul that Christ died for my sins according to the Scriptures? Have you received this gospel? Have you been saved by this gospel? Have you trusted in Jesus to forgive you your sins? Do you live your life in accordance with this gospel? May it please the Lord that each one of us will believe the gospel and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and know the forgiveness of sins which he alone can give us.

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## **Chapter 4: Barnabas and Paul at Lystra and Derbe (Part 2) - Acts14:8-10**

We come now to consider a remarkable incident which took place in Lystra, where Barnabas and Paul were serving the Lord.

## 1) A Man In Great Need.

As Barnabas and Paul continued to preach the good news they saw a man in great need. What we are told about him gives us a description of human frailty. We read in Acts 14:8:

*“In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked.”*

He was a rather sad individual who had never been able to walk, and that is emphasised by the mention that he was sitting when this incident occurred. As we read the condition of this man, people would have been perfectly justified in calling his state incurable and his future a hopeless one. He was a rather tragic case, and in much need.

In many ways his physical condition is a picture of the spiritual condition of the human heart. Like him, according to Romans 5:6, we are all without strength or powerless spiritually speaking. Naturally we do not have the ability to obey God’s Word, nor have we the ability to save ourselves, such is the devastating effect of sin on the human race. The verse from Romans 5 just mentioned tells us the importance of Christ’s death for sinners in this context.

*“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.”*

Wonderfully what sinners could not do because they were without strength, without the spiritual ability to please and obey God, he has provided for all those who repent and trust in the death and blood shedding of Jesus Christ.

When we consider this lack of spiritual ability we understand why so many have no desire to follow Christ and walk in his ways. They ‘sit’, as it were, with God’s wrath hanging over them and little or no concern for their desperate condition. William T. Metson, the hymn-writer has penned these words:

*“Lord I was dead, I could not stir my lifeless soul to come to you.”*

Indeed, we were all like this once. And like this man our spiritual inability and lack of godly desire and deadness to eternal issues did not come upon us at some stage in our lives; rather we were born like this. The testimony of David and Psalm 51:5 makes this abundantly clear:

*“Surely, I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”*

We should not forget that we sin because we are sinners. The fruit of sins in our lives is due to the fact that the root in our lives is sin. In a spiritual sense and apart from God’s grace, we have never walked in the ways of the Lord. However much we may try, we cannot please God. Only his gracious intervention and mercy upon us can change and transform our lives and make them pleasing to him. Now we need to pause at this point and ask ourselves some

very important questions. Returning to the poor man at Lystra who has served as an illustration of the spiritual parallel we have just outlined, does this description of human frailty find a positive response from your own life? Do you recognise that you are ‘without strength’, ‘sitting’, ‘lame from birth’ and ‘have never walked’ spiritually speaking? Oh, you may be fine physically and have strong feet and legs, but what about on the inside, in your heart? If that is how you feel before God, then take heart; for the rest of this chapter will bring you hope.

As we have been thinking of this poor crippled man who had never walked, and of his helpless and hopeless state, there is in verse nine a glimmer of light and hope.

*“He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed...”*

What this helpless and hopeless lame man heard was not just a man talking, but of God’s servant preaching the good news concerning Jesus Christ, the good news of ‘the gospel’. We observe that what this needy man heard had an arresting and dramatic effect upon him, for the passage tells us that as Paul looked directly at this man he detected *“... that he had faith to be healed.”* Now the literal meaning of this phrase is ‘he had faith to be saved.’ In other words, through the preaching of God’s Word and the proclamation of the gospel, this poor, lame man had ‘saving faith’. Now it is often the case that when the phrase ‘faith to be healed’ is used, it meant to be saved from both bodily and spiritual maladies or diseases. We

see an example of this in the healing of the lame man at the temple gate called ‘Beautiful’, through the instrumentality of Peter and John in Acts 3:16 which emphasises his faith.

*“By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see.”*

Coming back to our text (Acts 14:9), the lame man, as he heard the gospel preached had a desire for spiritual reality. He longed to know more about the Lord Jesus Christ, and his power to cleanse from sin, and his power to heal his body. He challenges us to search our hearts to see if we are concerned more than anything else about our spiritual need before God, knowing that he is holy and we are sinners. Have you, like this helpless and hopeless cripple, a desire for spiritual reality that you may say like Paul in Philippians 3:10:

*“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.”*

That is a real challenge for us, yet one we must take very seriously indeed. What is so wonderful about this is that God delights to respond to such a desire, as we see with this dear man at Lystra. In Acts 14:10 we read:

*“Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed and called out, ‘Stand up on your feet!’ At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.”*

The response which Paul gave to seeing in this poor man a desire for spiritual reality, that he had faith to be saved, was to proclaim in a loud voice *“Stand up on your feet.”* You may recall that when Jesus came to the tomb of Lazarus we read in John 11:43:

*“Jesus called in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out’.”*

Paul knew that only the power and authority of the Lord could transform, strengthen and heal this poor and needy man. Now what Paul was asking this man to do was something he had never done before in his life - that is to stand up straight on his feet. He was asking him to do that which was physically and humanly impossible. But we always need to remember the precious words of the Lord Jesus Christ in Luke 18:27:

*“What is impossible with men is possible with God.”*

And so we read, *“the man jumped up and began to walk.”* It will be observed that what happened to this crippled man is so similar to what happened to the lame man at the temple gate in Acts 3:8. This was a further demonstration of the Lord’s power and authority and mercy.

We see in the outward, physical, healing of this man crippled from birth a picture of what the Lord had done for

him inwardly and spiritually. We are told he had faith to be healed. This is faith in the atoning work of the Lord Jesus and his power over sin and its consequences. The Lord had worked and transformed his life.

As we review this incident at Lystra, witnessed by Barnabas and Paul, can I ask whether you in your own life have witnessed a demonstration of divine authority? Can you recall the day when the Lord, by his mighty power, transformed and changed your life? Oh, you may not have been crippled physically, but you were spiritually as sin had ruined your life. Then has the Lord transformed you and forgiven you and changed you within? “How?” you may ask. In Romans 10:17 we find the answer:

*“Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”*

Have you heard God’s Word calling you to trust in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, to forsake your sin and sinful life? Have you exercised faith in the Lord Jesus, taking him at his word, believing his promises and trusting him fully? If you do, you too will be able, like the poor cripple in our story, to jump up and walk, because the Lord has given you new life in his beloved Son.

## **Chapter 5: Barnabas and Paul at Lystra and Derbe (Part 3) - Acts 4:11-8**

As we read through the Acts of the Apostles, we are often amazed by the numerous and varied experiences through which God's servants had to pass, and the verses we shall look at now are no exception. We come to consider the sequel to the healing of the lame man at Lystra and the reaction of the people of that city, and it was a very sad response which shows us something of the darkness of the unbelieving mind.

### **1) A Wrong Reaction.**

We read in Acts 14:11:

*“When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, ‘The gods have come down to us in human form!’”*

We note firstly that this was a wrong recognition, because Paul had not healed the man but God had done it. And to think that Paul and Barnabas were ‘gods’ who had come down either from heaven or Mount Olympus where the Greeks believed the gods lived, showed their true spiritual ignorance. Many Bible commentators believe the fact these people spoke in the Lycaonian language is significant. It is suggested that because Barnabas and Paul spoke Greek and not this vernacular language of the country, they might not have realised the full significance of what the people were saying until they saw the priest

approaching with sacrifices and garlands (v13). However, what we see in verse eleven was still a wrong reaction.

## **2) A Wrong Description.**

This very unusual reaction to Barnabas and Paul led to the people's wrong description. Acts 14:11:

*“Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker.”*

So we see these idolatrous people went even further and not only said that Barnabas and Paul 'were gods', but they gave them names: Barnabas was called 'Jupiter', or 'Zeus', while Paul was called 'Mercury' or 'Hermes'. The first names being Roman and the latter Greek. In the popular mythology of the day, it was believed that Jupiter or Zeus had visited the earth accompanied by Mercury or Hermes who was the supposed interpreter or spokesman of the gods. The reason why Paul, who was the chief speaker (v12) was called 'Hermes' is down to the mythology of the people, because this 'god' held the position of interpreter, ambassador, or spokesman. But whatever their reasons they were completely wrong to assume such a description for these two servants of the Lord.

## **3) A Wrong Action.**

Quickly following on from this we read (v13):

*“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.”*

The darkness of idolatry shows itself even darker by this wrong action by these people. They believed there were ‘two gods’ in their midst, so they proceeded to offer sacrifices to them. The priest of Jupiter or Zeus, who had a temple outside the city brought bulls and garlands with the intention of offering sacrifice to these gods. Bulls were regarded by both the Jews and Gentiles as the most costly victims, and as such were offered to the chief or father of the Greek gods. But here again these people are guilty of a grievously wrong action because Barnabas and Paul were only men, and the one alone who is to be worshipped is the Lord God. Added to that, it was the Lord who had healed the man therefore the praise should have been given to him alone.

The tragedy of this example of first century superstitious idolatry is that it is not confined to that period of history, but still exists in various forms today and holds many under its power. For example, someone may have been healed from a serious disease and yet credit or adulation is not given to God but to a man who claims ‘he can heal’. In other areas of life we have those who claim to be able to predict the future such as fortune-tellers, interpreting signs of the Zodiac. There are astrologers, considering the constellations of the stars etc. They are acclaimed as having great power. We must be careful not to become

attracted to or entangled with such things, for they are not from God. Anything or anyone that is revered or worshipped or held-up in the place of God Almighty should have no place in our lives. Remember Jesus' words to Satan in Matthew 4:10:

*“Away from me, Satan! For it is written, ‘Worship the Lord you God, and serve him only’.”*

The same teaching is found in the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy 6:13:

*“Fear the Lord your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name. Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you.”*

We need to pray that the Lord will help us not to fall into making the same kind of mistake these people at Lystra made.

#### **4) A Right Response.**

Barnabas and Paul immediately sought to bring the light of the Christian gospel into the situation because what was taking place distressed them greatly. We read (v14-18):

*“But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: ‘Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless*

*things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.’ Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.”*

In these verses we see an amazing contrast to the response of the people of Lystra, and they help us to see the light of the Christian gospel. The first thing to point out is the humility of Barnabas and Paul. These two beloved servants of the Lord understood what was being said and done so they tore their outer garments. This was a customary method of expressing grief or showing indignation and abhorrence of impiety or blasphemy committed in one’s presence. But this action was not sufficient for Barnabas and Paul, for *“they rushed out into the crowd, shouting: ‘Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you.”* Their integrity is lovely to see in this response as they could have so easily profited from the situation by simply agreeing with what the people wanted to do.

We also see that Barnabas and Paul were genuinely concerned because they told the people (v15) that they were in actual fact bringing them good news. And here we see the true hearts of these missionary servants, for they were not just trying to stop these people offering sacrifices to them, but they were bringing them the gospel of Christ.

They faithfully told them to turn from these worthless lifeless and imaginary deities to the living God. He is the God who really exists, as distinguished from these false gods. He is also ‘life-giving’ as the source of all existence. This genuine concern which Barnabas and Paul had for the people was based on the knowledge and experience which they themselves had of the living God. They could ‘preach’ about the living God, because they knew him.

We have to add that Barnabas and Paul were very courageous and loyal to the Lord, because having told the people to “*turn from these worthless things to the Living God*” they then proceeded to give a faithful description of God to whom they should turn to and trust in. They showed him to be the Creator of the universe “...*who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.*” They explained that this great God had in past generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways, to do their own things, believe their own ideas: “*In the past, he let all nations go their own way.*” Nevertheless, they told the people that God had spoken to the nations through many kind and loving acts. They gave the examples of God’s kindness in sending rain, fruitful seasons, abundantly satisfying their needs, and giving them pleasure and happiness. Barnabas and Paul were faithful to the Lord by directing the people to him, but we sadly read (v18):

*“Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.”*

These people had ample evidence of the true God but refused to acknowledge him, like those we read of in Romans 1:18-21, and so were without excuse for not acknowledging him as their creator. We do know that some came to trust the Lord (Acts 14:21-22) and we will consider that in our next chapter. However, verse 18 informs us that due to the gracious, faithful and firm efforts of Barnabas and Paul the people did not sacrifice to them. You will observe that it was with great difficulty that the people were restrained, but their efforts were rewarded and they were successful.

### **5) Application.**

As we reflect on Barnabas and Paul in this incident, we have seen their humility of character, their concern for the spiritual state of the people, and their faithful contending for the Lord. We need to remember that the Lord has called us to be his witnesses, and in Jude 3 he exhorts us:

*“...to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.”*

We may, like Barnabas and Paul, have to strive, struggle and endure suffering, but it is worth it to serve the Lord who loved us and gave himself for us. With the darkness of unbelief all around us, let us be those who hold forth the light of the Christian gospel to the glory of God and his beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Chapter 6: Barnabas and Paul at Lystra and Derbe (Part 4) - Acts14:19-21**

As we have followed the life of Barnabas, we have been made aware that his experiences, and those of Paul his missionary companion, were full of excitement, uncertainty, encouragement, confrontation, suffering, sorrow, joy, blessing and much more. In this chapter we conclude a look at their visit to the city of Lystra and also go on to see their next destination. In our previous chapter we saw that Barnabas and Paul managed to stop the people sacrificing to them and we noted that some in Lystra did believe the good news about Jesus. The question we are going to begin with today is, how did the bulk of the people respond?

### **1) An Attack Experienced.**

Tragically some of the unbelieving Jews whom we met when Barnabas and Paul were in Antioch and Iconium, came to Lystra. They had stirred up persecution and opposition to the Lord's servants, and they came to do the same again (v19):

*“Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead.”*

These unbelieving Jews were not content to persecute God's servants in their own cities, but were prepared to travel long distances to keep up the pressure and conflict

against Barnabas and Paul. They persuaded the people to let them attack Paul. This persecution was of the most extreme kind, namely stoning Paul, the servant of the Lord. They not only stoned him, but also violently pulled him out of the city. The reason for this was not to bury him (for they did think he was dead), but for exposure and to free the city from the impurity incurred by the presence of a corpse so odious and despised by both Jews and Gentiles. You may recall that earlier in the book of Acts Stephen was first dragged out of the city of Jerusalem and then stoned in Acts 7:58, whereas here we read that in Lystra Paul was stoned and then dragged out of the city. The difference was that no one was permitted to be put to death inside the Holy City of the Jews (Jerusalem), but this did not apply to provincial cities of the Gentiles such as Lystra. It is evident that because they thought he was dead, it was a severe attack they had made upon him. Really vicious. There is no mistaking that their intention had been to kill him. That they thought he was dead indicated at the very least that he was severely injured.

We learn again that Satan and his hosts will always be trying to wage war against God's servants. Consider these words of Jesus to his followers in John 16:33:

*“I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

And added to that, just as the Lord revealed to Paul that he had to suffer for the cause of Christ (see Acts 9:16), so

God's servants today must expect to face hardship, trial and persecution. We also need to remember that the termination of our lives is not in the hands of a stone-throwing mob, but in God's hands. It is Job who teaches us in Job 1:21 that it is the Lord who gives and the Lord who takes away, not men. That is truly comforting for us to remember. Our times are in the Lord's hands.

## **2) God's Amazing Mercy.**

As Paul lay on the ground a group of people gathered around him. They are called "*disciples*" and were clearly some of the new converts who had trusted in the Lord. They encircled Paul, possibly to bury him, or to lament over him, or to see whether he was still alive and even to conceal that fact from his opponents. We read (v20):

*"But after the disciples had gathered round him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe."*

Now whether he was only knocked unconscious, or was really dead from the vicious stone-throwing mob we do not know, but one basic fact is clear, only the Lord could have raised him up and enabled him to go back into the city in which he had been stoned and from which he had been dragged. The miracle of God's mercy here is that Paul's life was preserved and he was given such strength and vigour as to put him back on his feet again, such was the thoroughness of the restoration the Lord granted for him to be strong enough to walk. And there was more because we

then read that on the day following, Paul and Barnabas left Lystra and travelled to Derbe, which was a journey of approximately 20 miles in a south-easterly direction. It will be observed that Barnabas' name is mentioned here. Now it would appear that Barnabas escaped the persecution which Paul suffered. The reason for this was that Paul was (v12) "*the chief speaker*", not only concerning the Christian gospel, but in opposition to idolatry and anti Christian Judaism at Lystra, Antioch and Iconium. Unlike Antioch and Iconium, which had synagogues and Jewish settlers, Lystra appears to have been composed of only Gentiles in this secluded area.

This Bible passage presents us with a number of important lessons. First, what greater comfort could any believer desire in the midst of persecution, than to be surrounded by fellow-believers. We are told in Galatians 6:2 to

*"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ."*

So we need to draw near to those believers who are going through trial and adversity of whatever kind. We will find that often just our presence is a real encouragement to them.

Second, that determination, courage and faithfulness is needed by the Lord's servants after suffering persecution, so that the work and witness of the Lord will be maintained. Remember the promise given to the Church in

the city of Smyrna by the risen Lord Jesus Christ. You will find these words in Revelation 2:10:

*“Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.”*

Third, restoration to health and strength for Paul, and the preservation of Barnabas from any physical harm, were in the Lord’s hands and determined by his holy and perfect will. Psalm 103:3-4 tells us concerning the Lord that:

*“He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases; he redeems my life from the pit and crowns me with love and compassion.”*

### **3) An Additional Sphere of Service.**

The very next day to this dreadful ordeal, Barnabas and Paul travelled to another city to share the gospel with its peoples. We read (v20-21):

*“The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe. They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples.”*

Barnabas and Paul travelled to Derbe, and again we see them engaging in the work which is dearest to their hearts, namely preaching the gospel about Jesus. Their ministry in Derbe seems to have been very effective, for we read that they ‘...won a large number of disciples’. Through their preaching, many more came to know the Lord Jesus Christ

as their Saviour, and these words also seem to imply that they were formed into a local church because they became ‘disciples’. The word means learners, those who believed and confessed that Jesus Christ was their Saviour and Lord. These young disciples would not only have trusted in Christ, but through the teaching ministry of Barnabas and Paul they would have been instructed in God’s Word and taught those important truths for their spiritual growth and development. There is, in this verse, a vitally important truth which must not be overlooked. When someone is born again that’s not the end, but only the beginning. To be saved by the precious blood of Christ is to enrol you in the school of Christ, where you become a learner or disciple; and it is a school in which you will remain for the rest of your earthly life. The ministry therefore in which Barnabas and Paul were engaged included both “*preaching the good news*” and as verse 22 tells us, “*strengthening the disciples*” in their faith.

You may recall what Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus about the Lord in Ephesians 4:11:

*“It was he (that is Jesus) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.”*

In Barnabas and Paul, God had given to these people at Derbe two men who were evangelists and also teachers, so that they might be equipped for the work of the ministry.

#### **4) Lessons To Apply.**

First, it does not matter how unbelieving or antagonistic a people may be to the gospel, if the good news is preached in the power of the Holy Spirit then it may please the Lord to work. We read in 1 Corinthians 1:21:

*“For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.”*

So we must keep on preaching the message of Christ and him crucified.

Second, when men and women are converted or born again, this should be the commencement of their discipleship as learners in the school of Christ. There is a very helpful passage about this in Colossians 3:12-17:

*“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and as you sing*

*psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”*

Finally, the best and most effective and Biblical way for believers to grow spiritually, is by committing ourselves to a local fellowship of the Lord’s people. Attendance at the various meetings for worship, Bible teaching, prayer, communion and fellowship will cause our spiritual life to grow and we will be enabled to encourage one another in the faith. So are you one of God’s redeemed people? May we all be so, and unite together in fellowship, worship and service for our blessed Lord and Saviour.

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## **Chapter 7: Barnabas and Paul Revisit Lystra, Iconium and Antioch – Acts14:21-23**

The success of the gospel in Derbe signalled the turning point in this missionary journey and Barnabas and Paul began to make their journey home:

*“Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. ‘We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,’ they said. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.”*

## 1) The Ministry Of Encouragement

It is significant that we are told the words “*Then they returned...*” In the earlier part of verse 21, we read of Barnabas and Paul preaching the good news in Derbe and that through their ministry many were added to the Lord and became his disciples. Now as Barnabas and Paul leave the city of Derbe they are on their way back to the Church at Antioch in Syria from where they had been sent out. However, instead of returning to Syria by the shortest way, which would have been through Cilicia, Paul’s native country, they decided to retrace their steps and revisit Lystra, Iconium and Antioch in Pisidia. You will recall that when they had preached and ministered in each of these cities previously, they had had to leave because of the persecution that arose. It would surely have been easier for them to have returned home by the quickest route and to bring their news to the Church at Antioch in Syria. But Barnabas and Paul had a deep and loving interest in the new Churches they had planted, and having sown the good seed of the Word they now wished to water it; or using another horticultural expression, these Churches were like tender plants, recently planted, which needed to be fed and tenderly cared for if they were to grow, mature and produce fruit. This was the reason why Barnabas and Paul revisited these young Churches.

This interest in the Churches by these two servants of the Lord is something which we see and read of in Paul’s letters written later to Churches. There was a wonderful bond between the Lord’s servants and the Lord’s people

gathered in different locations. A few examples from Paul's letters will illustrate this. In Romans 1:11 he said to the Church in Rome, *"I long to see you."* Then in 2 Corinthians 11:28 he said, *"I face daily the pressure of concern for all the churches."* When writing to the Churches in Galatians 4:20 he declared, *"How I wish I could be with you now."* Writing to the Philippian Church he said in Philippians 1:8: *"God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus."* And so we could go on. The example set before us by Barnabas and Paul is something which should stimulate us today. So we need to ask ourselves, 'What sort of interest do we take in other Churches?' For example, when we hear of things going well, do we praise the Lord and thank him for his blessing on that Church? When we hear of things going wrong, do we talk to others about it or do we prayerfully bring it before the Lord that he will resolve the problem and bring unity and love to the fellowship? Our interest should be prayerful, practical and personal.

When Barnabas and Paul met the believers in these relatively new Churches it was not because they had just a passing interest, but a deep spiritual interest in them, desiring that they would be instructed and strengthened in the Lord. To begin with they confirmed or strengthened or established them. It is rather like a caring gardener firming the soil around tender plants or inserting stakes to support young trees. They gave them teaching that was designed to help them understand further the grace of God that was at work in their lives. And this instruction was designed to exhort or entreat them to continue in the faith and not turn

back to their old sinful ways and desert the Lord Jesus. Paul's exhortation to the church at Colosse is worth recalling at this point in Colossians 1:23. Paul wrote:

*“...continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.”*

In addition, the instructions received by these believers included warning of conflict, because they said: *“We must go through many hardships...”* Note that Barnabas and Paul included themselves in those who must go through many hardships. They were faithful to inform these believers that hardships or pressures are unavoidable for believers. Remember the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 10:22:

*“All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.”*

Some might consider this rather discouraging teaching even though it is necessary. It was not easy teaching to receive so Barnabas and Paul did include a word of consolation to help the believers to persevere when trials came. They said we must go through hardships and following that we would *“enter the kingdom of God.”* Sometimes entering the kingdom of God refers to that which happens to a sinner when first he trusts in Christ; but here it would seem to be the culmination or consummation

of the believer's life on earth when they enter into the state of future blessedness. Jesus' words in John 14:3 help us:

*“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”*

There are a number of lessons for us to note. First, each believer needs to listen to the Word of God so that we are confirmed or strengthened in the faith. And a good question to ask ourselves is, ‘Are your roots firmly in Christ as the only hope for your salvation and your future home in glory?’ But then we also need to ask if each believer desires to continue in the faith? Is it your earnest prayer that you may be able to say what Paul said of himself to Timothy: *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith?”* We also need to ask if each believer reading this is expecting and willing to face conflict in the Christian life. Remember we must go through many hardships. A Christian hymn writer named Henry White has put it like this:

*“Oft in danger, oft in woe,  
onward Christians, onward go.  
Bear the toil, maintain the strife,  
strengthened with the bread of life.”*

Further, is each believer looking forward to the consolation of entering the kingdom of God?’ Here is the goal and blessed hope of all our faith and Christian warfare, that one day we will be with Christ in his Father's kingdom.

## 2) Leadership For The New Churches.

The leadership of each of these very new Churches was something Barnabas and Paul took very seriously. We read in verse 23 that:

*“Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church.”*

The primary purpose in appointing elders was that each Church would have a proper organisation or ruling body to direct or govern the affairs of the local Church and give pastoral oversight in accord with Biblical teaching. The term *‘appointed’* is an interesting one because it means to stretch out the hand or to appoint by show of hands. Much controversy has arisen over the meaning of this. In the light of the fact that these were new Churches it is probable that Barnabas and Paul suggested names of those who they reckoned were suitably qualified to become elders, and then submitted their names to the Church for approval. If the Church agreed, then they would have ordained them. We must remember that these Churches were still in their infancy, and so spiritual discernment by godly and experienced men like Barnabas and Paul would have been invaluable.

Although Acts 14 does not give these details, but from elsewhere in Scripture we are given the qualifications that were and still are needed for those called to be elders or pastors or overseers (these terms are used interchangeably in the New Testament). The qualifications are detailed in I

Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 and speak of those who, being raised up and qualified by the work of the Holy Spirit were spiritually minded men whose godly character and influence was known both within the Church and by outsiders. They had to be men able to teach the Scriptures and whose lives were lived for the glory of God. They were appointed to have the spiritual care of and to exercise oversight over the churches.

We are told in Acts 14:23 that the appointment of the elders was done with prayer and fasting. Here were spiritual men being set apart for a spiritual work, and therefore each Church spent time in prayer and fasting before the Lord, that his will might be done, his wisdom and grace given to those appointed and his blessing rest upon the Church's witness. Verse 23 ends with Paul and Barnabas committing them to the Lord in whom they had put their trust. This would seem to mean that Barnabas and Paul deposited or entrusted for safe keeping, as a precious charge, these new elders and the believers in each Church to the Lord, the one in whom they had believed during Barnabas and Paul's earlier visits. Barnabas and Paul would have to leave them, but they were being deposited for safe keeping with the Lord.

It would appear from these and other references in the New Testament that local Churches had a plurality of elders. For example in 1 Peter 5:1-3 Peter writes:

*“To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will*

*share in the glory to be revealed: be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”*

Now if the Lord has set before us the pattern for the local Church, and this pattern includes elders, then we should be praying that the Lord will show to our Churches the person or persons of spiritual gift and maturity who will join together in the eldership.

So the Churches were left in the care of godly men who would watch over them for the Lord's sake.

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## **Chapter 8: Barnabas and Paul Return to Antioch In Syria – Acts 14:24-28**

After revisiting the new Churches in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch Barnabas and Paul continued on their journey back to their home Church in the other Antioch in Syria. You will remember it was from there that they had been sent out on this first missionary journey.

### **1) Retracing Their Steps.**

We consider first Acts 14:24-25:

*“After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.”*

In our last study we saw how that these two servants of the Lord left Derbe, and revisited the believers in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, not only to encourage and instruct them, but to appoint elders in each church. In the two verses we are looking at now, we see Barnabas and Paul continuing to retrace their steps. They had visited Antioch, the capital of Pisidia, and now they journeyed southwards through the whole length of the province until they arrive in Perga, the capital of the province of Pamphylia. It's interesting to observe that on their outward journey they arrived in Perga in Acts 13:13, but we have no record of them preaching in that city. It has been suggested this may have been because they were upset at the departure of John Mark and therefore felt unable to preach to the people, but we really have to say we do not know the reason. However, as they retraced their steps this situation is remedied for we read (v25) that they *“...preached the word...”* They declared to men and women the revelation from God concerning his eternal Son, the Lord Jesus Christ and the fulfilment of his plans to save sinful men and women through Christ's sacrifice and death on the cross. There appears to have been no opposition to their preaching, but neither do we read of what success or blessing they had either, just simply that they preached God's Word. They then left Perga and arrived at Attalia in Pamphylia, which was a seaport at the mouth of the river Catarrhactes.

There are two important lessons we need to note at this point. The first is that it is important that we keep in contact with or follow up those who profess to have trusted in the Lord, to ensure they are going on with the Lord. We must not abandon them but seek to do all we can to strengthen their faith. Sadly, some who claim to be involved in Church planting these days visit an area to preach the gospel but then leave any new believers to fend for themselves and we really must avoid falling into that mistake. The second lesson is that there may be situations in which it is difficult for you to speak for the Lord; but if you have the desire to share the gospel with others then the Lord may give you the opportunity to proclaim his Word on another occasion, as did Barnabas and Paul at Perga. We need to pray that he will grant us open doors to share the love of Christ with others. (Consider Paul's requests for prayer about this in Colossians 4:3-4 and Ephesians 6:19-20.)

## **2) Returning To Their Sending Church.**

It was from Attalia that they began their final stage of their journey to their Church in Antioch in Syria. We read in Acts 14:26:

*“From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.”*

We are reminded in this verse that it was from their Church that they had been sent out, and also it was from here that

they had been “*committed to the grace of God for the work.*” This is both a lovely thing to read and also very necessary. When Barnabas and Paul had left Antioch at the beginning of their missionary journey, you will recall that the Church met together with prayer and fasting, and then laid hands on them before sending them away (see Acts 13:3). The Church was in effect ‘delivering them’ or ‘handing them over’ to God and his grace for the work to which he had called them. They could not do this work apart from the help of God and so they had been committed or entrusted to God’s grace and protection and care in their work of mission. We see the precious fellowship and missionary vision that existed among the believers in this Church, and what a wonderful encouragement it must have been to Barnabas and Paul as they travelled to know that back home in Antioch they were being prayed for as they journeyed.

The reason for Barnabas and Paul returning to their base at this point in time is clearly stated in this verse, “*they had now completed*” the work. Just as they had been sent out by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:4), and guided and used by the Spirit during their visits to various places, so the Spirit had led them to return home, and so complete the work planned for them to do during this first journey.

We see here how, when anyone is called to serve the Lord, whether in a local Church or in full time ministry or missionary activity, it is important that their local Church ‘commends’ or ‘gives them up’ to the grace of God, for it is only by God’s grace that any work will be accomplished

for his glory. Note how Paul commended the elders of the Church at Ephesus to God's grace. In Acts 20:32 we read:

*“Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”*

We should do the same today and be much in prayer for those God has called to serve him in any particular way. In addition, any work which we seek to do for the Lord is ‘his work’. We are called to be his servants, but the work belongs to the Lord. This should encourage us to proceed as Paul instructed in Romans 12:11 where he urges us to:

*“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord.”*

That makes working for the Lord an immense privilege, and it prevents us from thinking the work belongs to us, which can result in pride and all the sad things associated with such a position. This is important because we can so easily fall into the errors of thinking we can ignore our home Church and of claiming the work somehow belongs to us.

The second thing we need to note is that we should never be satisfied until we have finished the work the Lord has given us to do. Jesus' words ring so clear in John 17:4:

*“I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.”*

If our Saviour did this, and Barnabas and Paul did this, we should not be satisfied with doing anything less. (See the assurance given in 1 Corinthians 15:8.)

### **3) Reporting What The Lord Had Done.**

When Barnabas and Paul eventually got back home to Antioch their first task was to gather the local believers, the Church, together so that they might report on their labours. Now it is both humbling and challenging for us to read what Barnabas and Paul said, for we read in verse 27 that they:

*“...reported all that God had done through them...”*

It would have been so easy for them to tell of the hundreds of miles they had travelled, of the crowds who listened to their ministry, of the many converted through their preaching, of the persecution and suffering they endured. But rather than dwelling on these things which would have focused attention on them, they direct the Church’s attention to the Lord and what he had done through them. The old Bible commentator Matthew Henry makes a lovely comment here:

*“God’s grace can do anything without minister’s preaching; but minister’s preaching, even Paul’s or Barnabas’, can do nothing without God’s grace and the operations of that grace must be acknowledged in the efficacy of the word.”*

This is precisely what Barnabas and Paul did. They informed the Church of what “*God had done through them,*” This reminds us of Paul’s description of himself and other servants of the Lord in 2 Corinthians 6:1 where he states that he was one of:

“...*God’s fellow workers...*”

We also need to note how Barnabas and Paul also reported (v27) that God:

“...*had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.*”

Now it was not just that God, through his servants Barnabas and Paul, had invited these Gentile sinners to hear the gospel, but he had inclined the hearts of many to receive by faith his invitation and to enter into his kingdom through believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. Barnabas and Paul did not open the door of faith to the Gentiles, neither did the Gentiles themselves open the door, but God did. It was a work of his sovereign and loving mercy and grace in each of their hearts, and therefore the work was a sure and steadfast work because God’s work never fails, and it gave all the praise to him.

Again a number of important lessons come from these verses.

First, it is vitally important that we support and meet together as local Churches. The ‘gathered Church’ in a local community should endeavour to meet together for

worship, prayer, Bible study, and as here, to hear what God is doing elsewhere.

Second, when speaking of our labours for the Lord, let us always remember it is his work and that any blessing is the Lord's doing, and that we are careful to give him the praise for all that has been accomplished.

Third, when sinners are saved, let us never forget that it is God who has saved them by *'opening the door of faith to'* them. We find this throughout the New Testament, and another clear example is in Acts 16:14 where we read concerning a lady named Lydia that:

*"The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message."*

Fourth, if anyone is to be saved they must exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The last verse of Acts 14 tells us Barnabas and Paul stayed in Antioch a long time:

*"And they stayed there a long time with the disciples."*

Now we might be inclined to treat that statement as just rounding off the chapter, but it contains important information. They were now back in the Church from which they had been sent out, but having arrived back, there was work to be done. The 'disciples' means the converts, the brethren, Christians, learners. As learners, they needed to be taught, and so Barnabas and Paul would

have resumed their ministry that we read of in Acts 13:1 as teachers of these converts or learners. This helps us to see that when we have completed one sphere of service for the Lord, he may have other work for us to do. So let us never be idle in the Lord's service, especially in seeking to teach new believers the Christian faith from the word of God. Our spiritual growth and development will only take place as we are taught from God's Word, the Bible. Let us then ensure that we are reading God's Word privately and we are attending services and meetings where God's word is expounded and taught.

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