

Faith to Persevere

Acts 14:8-11, 19-23
SS Lesson for 12/17/2017

Devotional Scripture: 2 Cor 1:3-11

OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW AND KEY VERSE OF THE LESSON

Key Verse: Acts 14:22

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

LESSON INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

PERSEVERANCE IN FAITH (ACTS 14:8-11)

Faith to be healed (8-9)

Healing accomplished because God is the only power that heals (Acts 4:7-10)

Healing accomplished, but it cannot be used by human will (Acts 19:13-16)

Healing accomplished through faith in Jesus (Acts 3:16)

Healing accomplished through God's Word (Ps 107:20)

Healing accomplished should result in praising God (Luke 17:15-18)

Healing accomplished should result in others praising God too (Luke 18:42-43)

Faith in obedience (10)

Obedience that is consistent with God's will (Isa 58:6-9)

Obedience that delights God (1 Sam 15:22)

Obedience that is from humble, praying, repentant people of God (2 Chron 7:14)

Obedience that is bold and steadfast (Dan 3:16-18)

Obedience through the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32)

Obedience through living in Jesus (1 John 3:24)

Faith in worship (11)

Worship of God only (Matt 4:10)

Worship in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24)

Worship to glorify God (Phil 3:3)

Worship with reverence and awe (Heb 12:28)

Worship that should never be lacking in zeal (Rom 12:11-13)

PERSEVERANCE DURING SUFFERING (ACTS 14:19-20)

Suffering for Jesus' sake (19)

Righteous suffering brings blessings from God (Matt 5:10-12)

Righteous suffering is rewarded by eternal life (Matt 19:29)

Righteous suffering strengthens (2 Cor 12:10)

Righteous suffering results in a crown of life (James 1:12)

Righteous suffering is commendable (1 Peter 2:19)

Support during suffering from believers (20)

Support of sufferers because of consideration of their works (Heb 13:7)

Support of sufferers because they deserve it (1 Cor 9:11-12)

Support of sufferers because it will be credited to the people's spiritual account (Phil 4:17-18)

Support of sufferers because there is a reward for doing so (Matt 10:41-42)

Support of sufferers because God will remember it (Heb 6:10)

PERSEVERANCE IN DISCIPLESHIP (ACTS 14:21-23)

Discipleship through preaching and teaching (21)

Preaching that is the word of truth (Eph 1:13)

Preaching that is the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:23-24)

Preaching that results in Christ being known (Phil 1:15-18)

Teaching with wisdom (Col 3:16)

Teaching with ability from God (1 Tim 3:2)

Teaching sound doctrine (Titus 2:1)

Discipleship to contend for the faith (22)

Contend by proof through Scriptures (Acts 18:28)

Contend by living a life worthy of the gospel (Phil 1:27)
Contend through obedience (1 Tim 1:18-19)
Contend by fighting a good fight of the faith (1 Tim 6:12)
Contend by obeying sound doctrine (2 Tim 1:13)

Discipleship through leadership (23)

Leadership that is entrusted with God's work (Titus 1:7)
Leadership that is blameless so as to encourage godliness (1 Thess 2:10-12)
Leadership that is faithful because of being given a trust (1 Cor 4:2)
Leadership that has integrity (Titus 2:7-8)

CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

PRACTICAL POINTS FROM THE BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR COMMENTARY

Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson teaches us to be aware of the dangers that accompanied the early disciples wherever they preached the gospel and to recognize the followship of the saints in supporting them as they displayed **Faith to Persevere**. The **study's aim** is to understand that serving the Lord consistently is often a lonely and tiring undertaking. The **study's application** is to urge the body of Christ to be understanding and aware of the needs of Christ's servants and always be ready to encourage and build up others.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Acts 14:22

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."

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

14:1-2. This paragraph (vv. 1-6) confirms the events which occurred in Pisidian Antioch. The Spirit of God was clearly prospering the apostles' ministry, as evidenced by their preaching **so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. But** again there was opposition (cf. growth and opposition in 13:49-50). The result of that opposition is seen in 14:6.

14:3. The NIV renders the connective *OUN* (normally trans. "therefore") with the word **So**. This conjunction is a bit of a problem. It may suggest that the time in which the opposition arose (v. 2) provided further opportunity for preaching. Or it may indicate that the opposition was an evidence of God's working in the hearts of the people (cf. 1 Cor. 16:8-9), thus leading to further preaching. Probably the latter is to be preferred. Again apostolic boldness is evident (cf. Acts 4:13; 13:46). The reference to **miraculous signs and wonders** was further confirmation of God's endorsement of this ministry (cf. 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 8:6, 13; 15:12). Later Paul referred to these miracles to validate the reality of the gospel among the Galatians (Gal. 3:5). This, of course, assumes the South Galatian view of the term "Galatia" in that epistle. (See the *Introduction* to Gal. for a discussion of the South and North Galatian views.) On the confirming nature of miracles, see 2 Corinthians 12:12 and Hebrews 2:3-4.

14:4. The apostolic band was referred to as **apostles**. And so they were, for the word means "those sent with authority as representatives of another," and these men had been sent out by the church of Antioch on the Orontes River (13:3) with the church's authority.

14:5-6. When Paul and Barnabas learned of a **plot... to mistreat... and stone them, they fled to... Lystra and Derbe**, cities of Lycaonia. Luke's accuracy as a historian has been vindicated here. Though Iconium was also a **Lycaonian** city its citizens were primarily Phrygian. In location and nature Lystra and Derbe were Lycaonian (cf. "Lycaonian language," v. 11).

14:7. Paul and Barnabas did not go to Lystra and Derbe simply to escape persecution; they also went to preach the gospel. The verbal construction **they continued to preach the good news** emphasizes continuity of action over a period of time.

14:8. **Lystra**, a Roman colony, was the home of at least one hopeless cripple. The dire circumstances of this man are seen in the repeated idea: **crippled in his feet... lame from birth... had never walked**. Apparently there was no Jewish synagogue in Lystra, so God used a different thrust, the healing of this helpless cripple, to bring the gospel to these people. This is the third time in Acts a cripple was healed (3:1-10; 9:33-35).

14:9-10. Paul's healing of this infirm man closely parallels Peter's healing in chapter 3. In each case the cripple was lame from birth (3:2; 14:8); both Peter and **Paul** gazed at the one **to be healed** (3:4; 14:9); and both healed men responded by jumping and walking (3:8; 14:10). This shows Paul was equal to Peter in his apostleship (cf. *Introduction*).

14:11-13. The response of the **Lycaonian** folk was one of pagan credulity. Because the people spoke in their native **language**, Paul and Barnabas could not understand what they were saying. Attributing deity to **Barnabas** and **Paul** probably can be traced to a legend about **Zeus** and **Hermes** visiting an aged Lystrian couple named Philemon and Baucis, who were abundantly rewarded for their hospitality. Zeus was the chief god and Hermes the messenger equivalent to the Roman gods Jupiter and Mercury, respectively. Why then would Barnabas be referred to as Zeus when Paul was the leader? The answer is that Paul was the spokesman and would therefore be called Hermes and Barnabas, the more retiring of the two, would be seen as Zeus, the dignified, behind-the-scenes god. In one spontaneous movement **the priest of Zeus... brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates** so the people could **offer sacrifices** to Paul and Barnabas. The wreaths were woolen garlands placed on the sacrificial animals.

14:14. When **the two apostles** discerned what was happening, they were horrified. **Their** tearing of **clothes** was a way of showing strong aversion to blasphemy. Usually rips were made four or five inches into the neckline of the garment.

14:15-18. This message, evidently preached by both apostles (pl. verb in the Gr.) is another sample sermon. It illustrates how these early preachers approached superstitious heathen. By contrast, the first of Paul's messages demonstrated how he preached to those well acquainted with the Old Testament (cf. 13:16-41). After disclaiming their own deity, they urged their hearers **to turn from** their cultic gods **to the one true and living God**. This God, Creator of all, is therefore supreme over all (cf. 17:24; Rom. 1:19-20). He is recognizable not only from His creating **rain** and **crops** but also by His beneficial providence in giving **food** and **joy**. Some interpret Acts 14:16 to mean that God will not judge the heathen who lived before the Apostolic Age. However, verse 16 must be taken with verse 17. Up to the time of the church, God gave no direct revelation to the **nations** (i.e., Gentiles) so they were responsible only for their reactions to the general revelation discernible in Creation (cf. 17:27, 30 and Rom. 1:18-20).

14:19-20a. Once again some **Jews** proved to be enemies of the gospel of grace, and turned **the crowd**, which had just tried to make Paul and Barnabas gods, against them so **they stoned Paul**. This is the second of five times a crowd was incited because of Paul's ministry (cf. 13:50; 16:19-22; 17:5-8, 13; 19:25-34). Whether or not Paul was **dead** is not stated; probably he was unconscious and at death's door (cf. 2 Cor. 12:2-4). At any rate his recovery was so rapid as to be miraculous. The reference to Paul's stoning (2 Cor. 11:25) undoubtedly had this incident in view (cf. 2 Tim. 3:11).

14:20b-21a. The apostles' ministry here, in the most remote and easterly of the cities reached in Asia Minor on this journey, was successful. The gospel met no great opposition and **a large number of disciples** were **won** over to the Lord Jesus (cf. 20:4).

14:21b-22. Tarsus, Paul's hometown, was only about 160 miles farther on from Derbe, but the two apostles retraced their steps in Asia Minor in order to confirm the churches so recently established. By warning and by promise, Paul and Barnabas strengthened (cf. 15:32, 41) and encouraged the believers. Previously Barnabas had encouraged the believers in Antioch of Syria (11:23). The warning consisted of a prediction of **many hardships** and the promise was the anticipation of entering **the kingdom of God**. The latter term certainly describes the eschatological reign of Christ on earth.

14:23. The believers were given not only edification but also organization. **Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church**. These elders were not novices in the faith (1 Tim. 3:6); they were probably Jews who came out of the synagogues where they had been steeped in the Scriptures. Thus elders from the synagogues became elders in the churches.

14:24-28. When the apostles returned **to Antioch** (retracing their steps through the provinces of **Pisidia** and **Pamphylia** and preaching **in Perga**; cf. 13:13-14), they gave to **the sending church** a full report of **all that God had done**. The clause, **how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles**, is most important: (a)

It shows the gospel had gone to Gentiles. (b) It was a "by-faith" message and not by works of the Law. (c) God did it, for He opened the door. Thus ends the first missionary journey which lasted between one and two years and in which Paul and Barnabas traversed more than 700 miles by land and 500 miles by sea. But more than that, it demolished the wall between Jews and Gentiles (cf. Eph. 2:14-16). The two apostles **had been committed** by the church at Antioch to God's **grace** (cf. Acts 15:40) and they saw His grace at work (cf. "grace" in 13:43; 14:3). Probably Paul wrote the Book of Galatians from Antioch shortly after his first missionary journey and before the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15).

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

Have you ever heard the saying "What does not defeat us will make us stronger"? How about this one: "When the going gets tough, the tough get going"? Maybe you have had someone tell you to "fake it until you make it." AH these clearly speak of enduring trials. In this week's lesson text, Paul and Barnabas were facing a very real, very intense situation. While in Lystra, Paul performed a miracle on a crippled man. He worked a life-changing healing in this man's life, to the astonishment of a pagan community. Now you would think that the townspeople would be elated, right? They were at first, until enemies convinced them to drag Paul to the outskirts of town after stoning him (Acts 14:19)! But Paul was not going to give up preaching; God had preserved his life, and his itinerant labors continued. It would have been pretty easy for Paul to just look up and say, "Hey, no one told me that I would get stoned for this!" He could have decided that he was finished following the calling he had to spread the gospel, It no doubt seemed his life would have been a lot easier. However, he was relentless about staying on the path chosen for him. He persevered and became one of God's greatest missionaries. Many of our brothers and sisters face such extreme circumstances daily. They are beaten, imprisoned, and even put to death for believing in Jesus. Yet as long as they are alive they continue to seek Him, whatever the cost. The majority of us, however, may never have to endure such intense persecution. This does not mean that we will have an easy life, however. In fact, we are promised the opposite. At some point, and no doubt more than once in our lives, we will face some sort of trial (cf. Luke 21:12). Christ promised us that. So what trial are you facing? For some of you, it could be contempt from unbelieving family members. For others, the trial might be in the workplace. Maybe you are struggling with finances. Each of us will have to cope with these trials, and our response will determine whether we will be victorious through them or not. How should we respond? First, we know that enduring trials will produce deeper character within us (cf. Rom. 5:4). This, in turn, will produce hope. Trials are meant to strengthen and purify us. They will do that if we allow God to teach us during them. When we face persecution or trials, it is easy to ask God why. Instead, why not ask God what lesson there is to learn. What is God trying to accomplish? What does God want from you at this time? These questions speak to the core of the situation. Remember, there will come a day when there is an end to all we face. Until then, we have to continue. We need an active commitment to a strong faith, whatever happens. It requires resolve on our parts, a steadfastness that proudly proclaims, "I will persist, come what may." Since "we are more than conquerors" (Rom. 8:37), we know the battle is won. All we have to do is keep pressing forward in faith.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Our text continues the story of Paul's first missionary journey of about AD 47-49. After traveling across the island of Cyprus, Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark sailed northward to Asia Minor (modern Turkey). From its south coast they traveled inland first to Perga, where John Mark called it quits (Acts 13:5, 13; 15:37, 38). It was then on to Antioch of Pisidia, a straight-line distance of about 75 miles; walking distance was much farther due to terrain. There Paul preached in the synagogue; his message led many to faith but provoked bitter opposition from others (13:13-52). This pattern was to repeat itself throughout Paul's missionary travels. Wherever the gospel went in Acts, it met with opposition as well as faith.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Perseverance in Faith (Acts 14:8-11)

8 And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked.

9 This man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed,

10 said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked.

11 Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!"

Faith to be healed (8-9)

Healing accomplished because God is the only power that heals (Acts 4:7-10)

7 They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?" 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! 9 If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, 10 then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.

Healing accomplished, but it cannot be used by human will (Acts 19:13-16)

13 Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." 14 Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. 15 [One day] the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" 16 Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

Healing accomplished through faith in Jesus (Acts 3:16)

16 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.

Healing accomplished through God's Word (Ps 107:20)

20 He sent forth his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave.

Healing accomplished should result in praising God (Luke 17:15-18)

15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. 16 He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him — and he was a Samaritan. 17 Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? 18 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

Healing accomplished should result in others praising God too (Luke 18:42-43)

42 Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." 43 Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.

Faith in obedience (10)

Obedience that is consistent with God's will (Isa 58:6-9)

6 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? 8 Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. 9 Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk,

Obedience that delights God (1 Sam 15:22)

22 But Samuel replied: "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

Obedience that is from humble, praying, repentant people of God (2 Chron 7:14)

14 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Obedience that is bold and steadfast (Dan 3:16-18)

16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

Obedience through the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32)

32 We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

Obedience through living in Jesus (1 John 3:24)

24 Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

Faith in worship (11)

Worship of God only (Matt 4:10)

10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

Worship in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24)

23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

Worship to glorify God (Phil 3:3)

3 For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—

Worship with reverence and awe (Heb 12:28)

28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,

Worship that should never be lacking in zeal (Rom 12:11-13)

11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Perseverance During Suffering (Acts 14:19-20)

19 Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.

20 However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

Suffering for Jesus' sake (19)

Righteous suffering brings blessings from God (Matt 5:10-12)

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Righteous suffering is rewarded by eternal life (Matt 19:29)

29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.

Righteous suffering strengthens (2 Cor 12:10)

10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Righteous suffering results in a crown of life (James 1:12)

12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

Righteous suffering is commendable (1 Peter 2:19)

19 For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God.

Support during suffering from believers (20)

Support of sufferers because of consideration of their works (Heb 13:7)

7 Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

Support of sufferers because they deserve it (1 Cor 9:11-12)

11 If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? 12 If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.

Support of sufferers because it will be credited to the people's spiritual account (Phil 4:17-18)

17 Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. 18 I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

Support of sufferers because there is a reward for doing so (Matt 10:41-42)

41 Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. 42 And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."

Support of sufferers because God will remember it (Heb 6:10)

10 God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.

Perseverance in Discipleship (Acts 14:21-23)

21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch,

22 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."

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.

Discipleship through preaching and teaching (21)

Preaching that is the word of truth (Eph 1:13)

13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,

Preaching that is the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:23-24)

23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Preaching that results in Christ being known (Phil 1:15-18)

15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16 The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18 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. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice,

Teaching with wisdom (Col 3:16)

16 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.

Teaching with ability from God (1 Tim 3:2)

2 Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

Teaching sound doctrine (Titus 2:1)

1 You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.

Discipleship to contend for the faith (22)

Contend by proof through Scriptures (Acts 18:28)

28 For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

Contend by living a life worthy of the gospel (Phil 1:27)

27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel

Contend through obedience (1 Tim 1:18-19)

18 Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, 19 holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith.

Contend by fighting a good fight of the faith (1 Tim 6:12)

12 Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Contend by obeying sound doctrine (2 Tim 1:13)

13 What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.

Discipleship through leadership (23)

Leadership that is entrusted with God's work (Titus 1:7)

7 Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless — not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.

Leadership that is blameless so as to encourage godliness (1 Thess 2:10-12)

10 You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. 11 For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, 12 encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

Leadership that is faithful because of being given a trust (1 Cor 4:2)

2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

Leadership that has integrity (Titus 2:7-8)

7 In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness 8 and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Luke once again selects a particular incident, which captures the essence of the ministry of Paul and Barnabas in a certain place. This event in Lystra gives us the flavor of the ministry here and elsewhere. In this case, Luke focuses our attention on a lame man, lame from his mother's womb, who is sitting in the audience while Paul is speaking.

When Paul and Barnabas were in Iconium, there was a synagogue, and that is where they began to preach the gospel. No such synagogue is mentioned in these verses describing their ministry in Lystra. This seems to indicate that there was no synagogue in Lystra. The scene that Luke describes appears to take place on the street or at some public place where the people of Lystra had gathered to hear Paul. Paul is obviously preaching the gospel. I am assuming that he was doing so in the Greek language. This would have been the commercial language of that place, but not the native tongue of these people (see verse 11). As he was preaching, Paul looked out into the crowd and saw a man whose countenance somehow indicated that he had the faith to be **"healed."** The word translated **"healed"** here is the same word that is so often rendered **"saved."** The Greek word is used for the saving of one's physical life (Luke 9:24), for raising a dead daughter to life (Luke 8:50), for the exorcism of a demonized man (Luke 8:36), and for spiritual salvation (Luke 8:12; 19:10). My sense here is that Paul perceived this man had faith – not only the faith to be healed, but also the faith to be saved. Paul riveted his eyes on this man and called out loudly to him to stand up on his feet – something this lame man had never done in his life. Immediately, the lame man leaped to his feet and began to walk.

Surely Luke intends for the reader to make the connection between the healing of this lame man and other miraculous healings of the lame in the Gospels and in Acts. In Luke 5:17-26, we read of the healing of the **“man who was lame from his mother’s womb.”** In this text, Jesus first assures this man that his sins are forgiven, and then He heals him, linking his spiritual healing with his physical healing (as Paul seems to do in our text as well). In Acts 3:1-10, we read of the man, **“lame from his mother’s womb,”** who was healed at the hands of Peter and John. John R.W. Stott points out that two expressions found in Acts 3 (**“lame from birth,”** and **“looked directly at him”**), are found once again in our text in Acts 14, thus linking the two miracles. We are told that Paul called out the words, **“Stand upright on your feet”** (verse 10), in a loud voice. Paul was confident that God would heal this man, and thus he made it clear to those who were looking on that this was a miraculous healing.

We must remember that Paul is not speaking to these people in their native tongue, as verse 11 indicates. Thus, it took some time for Paul and Barnabas to understand what the people were doing in response to this great miracle. People were rushing about saying (in their own language), **“The gods have come down to us in human form!”** (verse 11). They were also calling Barnabas, Zeus (or Jupiter in Latin), and Paul, Hermes (or Mercurius in Latin).

Notice the reversal of Barnabas and Paul here. In their (cultural) way of thinking, the greater “god” was the silent one. The more talkative “god” (Hermes) would have been the spokesman for Zeus. If we think in terms of Moses and Aaron, Moses would have been Zeus and Aaron, his spokesman, would have been Hermes. As usual, Paul is doing most of the talking, while Barnabas tends to remain silent. Thus, they assumed that Barnabas was the greater “god,” while Paul was the lesser “god.” Thus, the reversal of **“Paul and Barnabas”** in our text.

The priest (of Zeus) arrived from the temple of Zeus, just outside the city. He brought with him oxen and garlands, which he was preparing to offer as a sacrifice to Barnabas and Paul. Suddenly, it became clear to these two missionaries that they were being worshipped as though they were gods. They had no desire or intention of receiving the worship of men. It was with great difficulty that Paul and Barnabas were finally able to put an end to this heathen ritual of honoring them as **“gods.”**

One can understand how the people of Lystra could misinterpret the miracle of the healing of the lame man. It is not as easy to understand how these people could so quickly turn from worshipping Barnabas and Paul to wanting to kill them – or is it? Once again, a student of the New Testament will recognize that we have been here before. After the raising of Lazarus, the crowds were eager to receive Jesus. Throngs of people assembled along the road to Jerusalem as Jesus made His triumphal entry (see John 12:12-18). By the end of the week, the crowds were crying out something very different:

13 Then Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people, 14 and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. When I examined him before you, I did not find this man guilty of anything you accused him of doing. 15 Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, he has done nothing deserving death. 16 I will therefore have him flogged and release him.” 18 But they all shouted out together, “Take this man away! Release Barabbas for us!” 19 (This was a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city, and for murder.) 20 Pilate addressed them once again because he wanted to release Jesus. 21 But they kept on shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!” 22 A third time he said to them, “Why? What wrong has he done? I have found him guilty of no crime deserving death. I will therefore flog him and release him.” 23 But they were insistent, demanding with loud shouts that he be crucified. And their shouts prevailed (Luke 23:13-23).

How could this be? Some would say that those who cried out for the blood of Jesus were a different group from those who welcomed Jesus at the triumphal entry. I don’t think so, any more than I think that those in Lystra who sought to worship Barnabas and Paul were a different group from those who stoned Paul. The explanation for both incidents is much simpler than that. The crowds who welcomed Jesus (and even the disciples of our Lord) had a very different set of expectations than Jesus did. They did not want a Messiah who would suffer and die for the sins of His people. Not even Peter wanted this (see Matthew 16:21-28). Peter was willing to draw his sword and die for a Messiah who would overthrow Rome and immediately establish His kingdom on earth. He was not so ready to associate with a Messiah who would submit to Rome’s authority and die.

When Jesus triumphantly entered Jerusalem, the crowds expected Rome to be overthrown, and the Kingdom of God to be immediately established. By the end of the week, it became very clear that this was not going to happen. Thus, the **“Messiah”** they welcomed at the triumphal entry was the **“Messiah”** they rejected before Pilate.

I believe the same thing happened in Lystra. The people of Lystra were interpreting what they had witnessed at the hands of Paul and Barnabas from their own cultural and religious perspective.

“About fifty years previously the Latin poet Ovid had narrated in his *Metamorphoses* an ancient local legend. The supreme god Jupiter (Zeus to the Greeks) and his son Mercury (Hermes) once visited the hill country of Phrygia, disguised as mortal men. In their incognito they sought hospitality but were rebuffed a thousand times. At last, however, they were offered lodging in a tiny cottage, thatched with straw and reeds from the marsh. Here lived an elderly peasant couple called Philemon and Caucis, who entertained them out of their poverty. Later the gods rewarded them, but destroyed by flood the homes which would not take them in. It is reasonable to suppose both that the Lystran people knew this story about their neighborhood and that, if the gods were to revisit their district, they were anxious not to suffer the same fate as the inhospitable Phrygians. Apart from the literary evidence in Ovid, two inscriptions and a stone altar have been discovered near Lystra, which indicate that Zeus and Hermes were worshipped together as local patron deities.”

Their actions were perfectly consistent with their religion. The problem is that their religion was wrong, and thus their actions (attempting to worship Barnabas and Paul) were also wrong.

It was not until after Paul spoke to these people (and they understood what he was saying) that they sought to stone him. Notice, too, that it was only Paul who was stoned, and not Barnabas. Paul proclaims the same gospel to these Gentiles that he preached in the Jewish synagogues, but he had to begin at a different place. His Jewish audiences believed in only one God, who created the heavens and the earth. They accepted the inspiration and authority of the Old Testament. They looked for a coming Messiah, who would take establish Him kingdom on earth. All Paul had to do was to show from the Old Testament that Messiah had to be rejected by His own people, put to death, and then rise from the grave. He then told how Jesus perfectly fulfilled these Messianic prophecies.

With this group, Paul had to begin at the beginning – literally. He told them that God created heaven and earth, and all that is in them. He informed them that this God had allowed the nations (non-Jews) to go their own ways, but that even so, He gave them many evidences of His love and care: things like the seasons and the rains and the satisfaction of food and gladness.

This is as far as the message went; at least this is as far as Luke’s report of Paul’s message went. It worked in that it successfully put an end to the peoples’ attempt to worship them (although this was with some difficulty). But Paul’s message went farther than this, although it may have taken a while for it to sink in. Paul was saying that he served the one true God, and that this God was the Creator of all things. His God had allowed men to go their own way for a time, though not without indications of His existence. By inference, this meant that Paul’s God was the only true God, and thus their “**gods**” were not gods at all. By mentioning that God had, up until now, let the Gentiles go their own way, Paul inferred that this was about to change. Paul had not only convinced these people that they (Paul and Barnabas) were not gods, but that their gods were not gods either. The message was clear: their religion was wrong; Paul and Barnabas had come to present to them the true God and true religion. They would have to forsake their religion if they were to accept Paul’s words.

At this point in time, the unbelieving Jews arrive from Antioch and Iconium. I’m sure that they must have said something like this:

“These men have come to preach a false religion to you. Their religion is also contrary to Judaism, and that is why we have come. Let’s work together to rid this town of their kind of religion, which is dangerous for us all.”

The people really didn’t change that quickly; the facts did. They had misinterpreted the healing of the lame man, basing their conclusions on their own religious expectations. As the Jews expected Messiah to come, these Gentiles expected their gods to return. But when they realized that the gospel Paul and Barnabas had come to preach would overturn their expectations, they chose to kill the messenger rather than to accept the message.

Let me attempt to illustrate this. A number of years ago, I was asked to visit a woman in the hospital who was dying of cancer. This woman had relatives in the Pacific Northwest, and they had shared with friends of ours living there that this woman was dying of cancer in Dallas. My friends called me, and I went to visit the woman in the hospital. I took a young seminary student with me. We both wore suits. When we knocked on the door, the husband welcomed us in enthusiastically. It later became obvious that he did so because he thought we were doctors. Once they learned we were preachers, the conversation was over, and the woman returned to reading her movie magazine. We were welcomed on the basis of a false assumption, but when the facts were evident, our welcome was revoked.

The unbelieving Jews and the Gentile unbelievers in Lystra joined together to rid themselves of Paul, whose preaching was an offense. It is not really surprising to see them working together, for the gospel was equally offensive, though for somewhat different reasons:

22 For Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks ask for wisdom, 23 but we preach about a crucified Christ, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. 24 But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:22-24).

They stoned Paul and dragged his body out of the city, assuming that he was dead. There are some who would like to find a miraculous resurrection from the dead here, but Luke's words hardly leave room for such a conclusion:

19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and after winning the crowds over, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, presuming him to be dead. 20 But after the disciples had surrounded him, he got up and went back into the city. On the next day he left with Barnabas for Derbe (Acts 14:19-20).

It was but another example of drawing the wrong conclusion from what they saw. This was a stoning. If you were going to stone someone to death, where would you aim to hit them with your rock? If you were going to kill a snake with a rock, where would you aim? You would aim at the head. We do not know how many hard blows to the head Paul took, but it was certainly enough to render him unconscious. These were not doctors, nor were they even skilled at stoning. They drug his apparently lifeless body out of town and left him for dead. The disciples were standing around Paul's body when he suddenly and unexpectedly rose up and entered the city.

Luke does not tell us that these disciples were praying for Paul's resurrection. We are not even told that they were seeking to revive him. They were just standing there looking at his apparently lifeless body, perhaps wondering what they would do next. Luke gives us absolutely no reason to assume that a great miracle of resurrection happened here.

There is a miracle, however. The miracle is that when Paul got up, he went right back into the city. Think about this. Paul went right back to the city where he had just been stoned and left for dead. Surely his Jewish enemies were still there and eager to finish the task (of stoning Paul) they had failed to complete. We shall see more about this at the conclusion of this message.

On the next day he left with Barnabas for Derbe. 21 After they had proclaimed the good news in that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, to Iconium, and to Antioch. 22 They strengthened the souls of the disciples and encouraged them to continue in the faith, saying, "We must enter the kingdom of God through many persecutions." 23 When they had appointed elders for them in the various churches, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the protection of the Lord in whom they had believed. 24 Then they passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia, 25 and when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. 26 From there they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. 27 When they arrived and gathered the church together, they reported all the things God had done with them, and that he had opened a door of faith for the Gentiles. 28 So they spent considerable time with the disciples (Acts 14:20b-28).

The next day, Paul and Barnabas left for Derbe, a lengthy trek from Lystra, one not easily made, especially by a man in Paul's physical condition. It is interesting to note that even though we are not given any details concerning their ministry in Derbe, many disciples were made there (verse 21).

How easy it would have been for Paul and Barnabas to continue traveling to the southeast to Tarsus (Paul's home city) and then on to Syrian Antioch. You will recall that on Paul's second missionary journey, this is the route Paul travels – in reverse – to get from Antioch to the churches they had planted on the first missionary journey (see Acts 15:41—16:1). That way they would have avoided all the dangers of returning to those cities where unbelieving Jews wanted to see Paul dead.

Instead, Paul reverses his course and returns to these very places, beginning with Lystra, followed by Iconium and Pisidian Antioch. In these cities, they followed up with the new believers ("**disciples**," verse 22). They urged them to persist in the faith, knowing that there would be much opposition and many difficulties ahead:

"We must enter the kingdom of God through many persecutions" (Acts 14:22).

Paul did not preach a prosperity gospel, nor did he promise an easy path for these new converts. How could he? In the first place, it wasn't true. In the second place, Paul's body bore the marks of the price he had paid for preaching Christ to these people.

In the past, I have marveled at the fact that Paul could so quickly appoint elders in these new churches. In many churches today, it seems to take years for a new elder to be recognized, and yet here we find elders being appointed in weeks or months. How can this be? I believe the answer has to be found in the synagogues, and particularly in the God-fearers who would be found there – folks like the Ethiopian eunuch, Cornelius, and Apollos. These folks appear to have been “Old Testament saints” who needed only to hear the good news that Jesus is the promised Messiah. The new elders were not newly-converted Gentiles, who had no knowledge of God; they were God-fearers, who saw that Jesus was the fulfillment of the promises they had embraced.

In the remaining verses, we read of the conclusion of the first missionary journey. Passing once again through Pisidia and entering the region of Pamphylia, they came to the city of Perga. This is the city where John Mark deserted Paul and Barnabas and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). While it does not appear that Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel in Perga on their first visit, we are specifically told that they had spoken the word in Perga before they went down to Attalia, the port from which they sailed to Antioch (via Seleucia – see Acts 13:4).

Having returned to the church which had sent them out, they reported the things God had done through them, and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. This was a monumental new thing God was doing, the implications of which were only beginning to become clear. They remained at Antioch for some time, spending time with the disciples. I understand this to mean that they spent this time ministering to the new believers at Antioch.

(Adapted from URL: <https://bible.org/seriespage/church-planting-acts-141-28>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Stories and experiences of opposition to the Christian faith can be very discouraging to us. Sometimes we look to the past and think that there was a time when the Christian faith was warmly and widely received. That selective memory contrasts with our view of the present, when it seems that hostility to Christian faith is common in all quarters. We do well in such instances to remember that suffering is the means by which we experience God’s kingdom. None of the biblical exemplars of our faith escaped suffering, and Jesus himself suffered supremely at the hands of his enemies. Hostility to the faith should not surprise us. But neither should those experiences of persecution blind us to the other things that God is doing. As he did with Paul and Barnabas, God is bringing people to saving faith through the faithful witness of his suffering people. Today, even as we see persecution coming from every direction, we also see faith in Christ taking root in the lives of people whom we thought far from God’s truth. The power of Christ that healed the lame man continues to transform lives around us in amazing ways. In fact, we realize that the power of Christ is often most clearly demonstrated among his people when they suffer. Are we ready to accept and act on both of these realities? Can we demonstrate firm faith in Christ when our faith is tested by suffering and persecution? Are we ready to acknowledge and celebrate the work of God that is happening all around us? Will we revere Christ in our hearts and serve in his name with our hands, despite the hardships and with expectation of his victory? Do we desire to see the victory of God enough that we are willing to see it in our own suffering?

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

1. God demonstrates His power to reveal His character and achieve His purposes {Acts 14:8-10}
2. Credit for God’s work belongs to God alone (vs. 11)
3. Christians must support one another as they face opposition to God’s work (vss. 19-20)
4. In the face of opposition, obey God and trust Him for the outcome (vs. 21)
5. Sharing the gospel and building God’s kingdom should take priority over our comfort and ease (vs. 22)
6. In unfriendly and hostile settings, know that God’s will always prevails, and proceed in faith (vs. 23)