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REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

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THE BOOK OF ACTS

Sermon Notes

Paul's First Missionary Journey, Part 5

Paul and Barnabas Complete the First Missionary Journey

Acts 14:19-28

October 14, 2007

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On August 2, 1990, the Iraqi Army, on orders of the nation's leader, Saddam Hussein, invaded the small, oil-rich nation of Kuwait. Within days, countries around the world condemned the move as a blatant act of international aggression. As a result of the invasion, the United States led an international coalition of forces into the region with the intent of liberating Kuwait. On November 29, the United Nations passed a resolution establishing a deadline that authorized the nations allied with Kuwait 'to use all necessary means' if Iraq did not withdraw from Kuwait by January 15, 1991. On January 17, 1991, fighting began when U.S.-led air units launched a devastating series of air attacks against Iraq, with this operation referred to as Desert Storm. On February 24, coalition ground troops attacked Iraq, and on February 26, Iraqi forces began retreating from Kuwait. Coalition troops pursued the retreating Iraqi troops into Iraq, to within 150 miles of Baghdad before withdrawing. President Bush declared a cease-fire on February 27.

In the immediate aftermath of the Persian Gulf War, patriotism in America was as high as it had been in decades. Further, President Bush's approval rating reached the highest of any sitting President in U.S. history. In fact, during the week of March 1, 1991, according to the Gallup Poll, President Bush's approval rating was at an incredible 89%.

However, only seventeen [17] months later, due in large part to economic woes at home, Bush's approval rating had plummeted to 29% - a 60-point drop in 17 months [yet, another first in U.S. History!]. Then, in November 1992, twenty [20] months after the liberation of Kuwait and an 89% approval rating, President Bush was defeated in his bid for re-election by Governor Bill Clinton of Arkansas. Such is the fickle nature of the American public. Yet, fickleness is not something that is restricted to the United States.

Nearly fifty years earlier, in the nation of Great Britain, a similar incident occurred. On May 7 [& 8th], 1945, Allied Powers accepted an unconditional surrender of the Nazi German forces, thus ending the Second World War. On that very day, a massive celebration was held in London, extending from Trafalgar Square all the way to Buckingham Palace. Present were King George VI, Queen Elizabeth, and the country's heroic Prime Minister, Winston Churchill. Shockingly, however, less than two months later, on July 5, Winston Churchill and his Conservative Party were soundly defeated in the United Kingdom General Election. As a result, Churchill was replaced by Clement Attlee as the British Prime Minister.

What is clear from these two examples is that all humans, regardless of culture, race, and time period, are fickle. It is true in the 20th and 21st Centuries, and it was true in the 1st.

I. The People of Lystra Stone Paul

- ❑ In **Verse 19**, Luke explains, 'But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.'
- ❑ The people of Lystra were certainly offended at Paul and Barnabas' refusal to accept the worship that was due only God.

- ❑ Paul had healed a man who had been lame from his mother’s womb, and he refused to take credit and receive worship for the miracle, the people sought to kill him. It is certainly true that **it is more offensive in this world to elevate Christ to his proper and rightful place than to elevate oneself to the level of God.** No doubt the reason for this is that we can see, touch, and feel the people we want to elevate. [Consider our modern-day obsession with celebrities and the demi-god status they hold in our American society.]
- ❑ The opposition came as far as the one hundred [100] miles from Pisidian Antioch.
- ❑ It is rather ironic that the actions of the Jews from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium parallel the actions of Saul in Acts 9:1-2, prior to his conversion, when he set out to Damascus in order to persecute Christians there.
- ❑ Further, the fickleness of this crowd is strangely similar to the crowd in Jerusalem who one day hailed Jesus as ‘the KING WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD’ [Luke 19:37-40; 23:23].
- ❑ In their fickleness, the Jews of Antioch and Iconium, as well as the people of Lystra, resemble to the ‘double-minded man’ of James 1:6-8:

James 1:6-8: ‘...the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.’

- ❑ Like the people who stoned Paul, the doubled-minded man is fickle, changing his loyalty, passion, and purpose with the changing of each circumstance in which he finds himself.
- ❑ The phrase ‘double-minded’ here in James 1:8 literally means ‘doubled-souled’; that is, one who seeks to please both God and man...one whose loyalties are clearly divided.
- ❑ ‘[people who doubt and are double-minded] may pray prayers of profession, but they do not pray authentically...The fickleness and instability James had in mind here is connected with real danger and destructiveness because loyalty to God is at stake.’ Kurt Richardson
- ❑ Yet, as Douglas Moo writes, “The Old Testament blesses those who pursue God with a ‘whole heart’ (Psalm 119:2) and condemns the person who exhibits a ‘divided heart’ (Psalm 12:2; Hosea 10:2). Jesus singled out Deuteronomy 6:5, with its demands for total allegiance, as one of the greatest commandments in the Old Testament: ‘Love the LORD your God with **all** your heart, and with **all** your soul, and with **all** your strength.”
- ❑ Without faith in the One, true and Eternal God, we are like waves tossed back and forth in the wind. Yet, when we fix our eyes upon Jesus [Hebrews 12:2], the unchangeable One, we remain unwavering in our conviction and pursuit of Him.
- ❑ **Thus, one of the hallmarks of a true believer is the steadfastness that comes with a fixed focus on the One who is the true anchor of all that we do:**

Hebrews 6:19-20: ‘This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.’

- ❑ ‘What is meant here is that ‘we are moored to an immovable object’ – and that immovable object is the throne of God Himself, established in the heavenly holy of holies.’ F.F. Bruce

- ❑ In 1572, the great Scottish Reformer, John Knox, was on his deathbed. His wife, sitting by his side, asked him ‘Where do you want me to read?’ Knox replied , ‘Read where I first put my anchor down, in the seventeenth chapter of John.’
- ❑ That passage, John 17:3, states, ‘This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.’
- ❑ Knox was steadfast and fixed in his lifelong commitment to Jesus Christ, standing in direct contrast to those who are so often fickle and wavering in their commitment to the Lord. Thus, as a result of his resolute commitment to Christ and His Gospel, he died, as James Douglass, the Regent of Scotland, would say shortly after his death, ‘[a man] who never feared the face of man.’

- ❑ Yet, although Paul was stoned and left for dead, the Lord spared his life. Paul would later speak of this stoning in his second letter to the Corinthian church:

2 Corinthians 11:25: ‘...Three times I was beaten with rods, **once I was stoned**, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spend in the deep.’

- ❑ In this same letter, Paul would also speak of God’s loving protection and provision, stating:

2 Corinthians 4:7-9: ‘But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; **we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed**; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.’

- ❑ The idea of not being forsaken [2 Corinthians 4:8] can be traced all the way back to the Old Testament, were YHWH promises never to forsake His people [Genesis 28:15; Deuteronomy 31:6; Joshua 5:1]. Furthermore, this is the word which Jesus Christ Himself speaks on the cross [Mark 15:34], quoting from Psalm 22:1, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?’ In other words, the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer, was stricken and forsaken by the Father, **in our place...as our substitute**, in order that we, God’s people, would never be abandoned or forsaken by Him.
- ❑ Therefore, although we may be ‘struck down’ by men, **we are never forsaken by God!** We may even be killed at the hands of men; however, we are eternally safe in the hand of the who was forsaken for us.

- ❑ Not only this, but this incident serves as a powerful fulfillment of Christ’s words to Ananias in Acts 9:16: ‘God, for he [Paul] is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.’

- ❑ After being left for dead, **Verse 20**, ‘the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city.’

II. Paul and Barnabas Continue to Preach the Gospel [in Derbe]

- ❑ Luke, then, writes, **Verse 20**, ‘The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe.’
- ❑ Derbe was about a forty mile walk from Lystra.
- ❑ Not only was Derbe at least a two-day trip from Lystra, but one can only imagine how difficult this forty mile trek would have been for Paul. He had been stoned and left for dead. He was beaten, bloodied, bruised. He likely had broken bones. Yet, he and Barnabas continued on...preaching the Gospel.
- ❑ However, in the midst of their difficulties and trials, Paul and Barnabas remained fixed on their task. They did not allow their circumstances to become the primary fact that dictated the direction of their mission. Indeed, their circumstances changed; yet, their calling and purpose, which was from God, remained fixed and constant. They did not live lives of constant reaction; rather, they live lives of a single-minded purpose: the glory of God in all that they do...whether in live, in tribulation, or in death.

III. Paul and Barnabas Return to Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch

- ❑ Luke writes, in **Verse 21**, that ‘After they had preached the gospel to that city [Derbe] and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch.’
- ❑ In other words, Paul and Barnabas chose to head right back in the direction of potentially fatal persecution. The modern day believer would likely see this as unwise or foolish. Yet, Paul and Barnabas knew what they had been called to do, and they remained fixed on that calling. The actions of Paul and Barnabas are reminiscent of the actions of Christ, who, just prior to His arrest, trial and crucifixion, headed for Jerusalem, knowing what His fate would be:

Luke 9:51: ‘when the days drew near for him to be taken up, **he set his face to go to Jerusalem.**’

- ❑ Not only were Paul and Barnabas returning to hostile territory, but, in retracing their steps, they chose, by far, the long way back to Antioch in Syria.

- ❑ Derbe was the easternmost church that Paul and Barnabas would establish on this first missionary journey. It is certainly worth noting; however, that had they continued traveling from Derbe to the southeast for about one hundred fifty [150] miles, they would have arrived at Paul's hometown of Tarsus. From there, it would not have been a difficult trek to Antioch [the city from which they began their journey]. In other words, this route would have been the quickest and easiest path back to Antioch; yet, the two missionaries chose to retrace their steps.
- ❑ The desire of Paul and Barnabas to glorify God through the establishment and strengthening of churches was something much greater than their own personal comfort. So must our concern be today, for **the life of the Christian never follows the path of least resistance!**
- ❑ Further, Paul and Barnabas, unlike many modern missionary efforts, were not concerned in winning a large number of converts in order to justify their own endeavor. Had they been, they would have likely continued to new cities in order to win new converts. Yet, they chose to strengthen and encourage the churches they had already planted.
- ❑ This is fully consistent with the words of the resurrected Christ in Matthew 28:18-20 [the Great Commission]: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe all that I commanded you...'
- ❑ We do not fulfill the Great Commission by simply making converts...we are to make disciples.
- ❑ In fact, Luke writes, in **Verses 21-22**, "They returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, *strengthening the souls of the disciples...*"

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- ❖ Luke mentions four ways in which Paul and Barnabas strengthened the souls of the disciples: (1) encouraging them to continue in the faith; (2) Telling them of the tribulations they will face; (3) appointing elders for them in each church; (4) commending them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

1. The first thing Luke mentions is that Paul and Barnabas **encouraged them to continue in the faith.**

- John Stott writes, 'A number of similar expressions are used in different parts of the New Testament to indicate that there was a recognizable body of doctrine, a cluster of central beliefs, which the apostles taught. Here it is called 'the faith', elsewhere 'the tradition', 'the deposit', 'the teaching', or 'the truth'.
- The 'faith' is most definitely made up of those core, essential doctrines that unite all believers, throughout history, with one another. They include such doctrines as:
 1. The Bible is the Word of God
 2. The Doctrine of the Trinity

3. The Two Natures of Christ
 4. The Doctrine of Original Sin
 5. The Virginal Conception / Birth
 6. The Substitutionary Atonement / Vicarious Death of Jesus Christ
 7. The Resurrection and Ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ
 8. Salvation [Only] by Grace Alone through Faith Alone in the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ Alone [to the Glory of God the Father Alone]
 9. Regeneration by and Indwelling of all Believers by the Holy Spirit
 10. Justification by Faith Alone in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ Alone
- A prominent internally-known Pastor, in a recent interview on CBS 60 Minutes said, 'I think you need to talk on the people's level...not dumbing it down, just saying...you know...I could get up here and try to impress you with Greek words and doctrine, and there are people who need that. They want to study deeper. But I know what I am called to do is to help you learn how to forgive today...I want to help you learn how to have the right thoughts today...just simple things.'
 - There is certainly nothing wrong with learning how to forgive and 'having right thoughts.' However, **both are impossible to do apart from the theology and doctrine of the Cross.** In other words, until we gain a glimpse into the wrath of God that we are due, we will never even begin to grasp the significance of the atoning work of Christ on the Cross. It is only when we begin to understand Christ's substitutionary work for us that we can gain a glimpse into how much we have been forgiven. It is then that we therefore able to truly forgive others.
 - Doctrine must be our foundation. It was the foundation for the early church, and it is the foundation of every church today who seeks to conform itself to the Apostolic model.

2. The second way that Paul and Barnabas encouraged the believers in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch was by **telling them of the tribulations they will face.**

- In **Verse 22**, Luke quotes the missionaries as stating, 'Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.'
- Paul had already proven this in his life, being stoned in Lystra. The Apostle would later speak of the physical scars that he bore after this incident.

Galatians 6:17: 'From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus.'

- ❑ Certainly, here, the ‘brand-marks’ to which Paul is referring are, those physical scars that he received while proclaiming the truth of the Gospel during his travels. One of the clearest examples of such an incident is here in Acts 14:9.
- ❑ It is possible that the historical background of Paul’s usage of ‘brand-marks’, that is *stigmata*, was from the practice of marking slaves, both those in the Temple and in Jewish homes, where the brands were a sign of ownership by the slave owners. Also, there may be a subtle reference to the ‘angelic branding’ in Ezekiel 9:4 of the sighing and groaning people as a protective sign from the LORD.
- ❑ Regardless of the actual background, the ‘brand-marks’, or the *stigmata*, which Paul received here in Lystra, serve as a personal identification with Jesus Christ, his Lord and Master. As one scholar [Robert Fung] writes, ‘They are marks called the marks ‘of Jesus’ not only as a sign of ownership, nor merely because they were incurred on account of Jesus’ name, but probably also because they gave palpable proof that Paul was suffering with his Lord (Romans 8:17; 2 Corinthians 1:5; Philippians 3:10)...’
- ❑ There is a common axiom that says: ‘No cross, no crown...’ Indeed, this was true for the Apostle Paul and for every believer who seeks to live a life that emulates the Lord [John 16:33; 2 Timothy 2:3; 3:12; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 5:10].
- ❑ As C.K. Barrett writes, ‘[Luke] makes it clear that the road his heroes were traveling was the way of the cross.’
- ❑ In his letters to the young Timothy, the Apostle Paul makes this point quite clear:

2 Timothy 2:3: ‘Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.’

2 Timothy 3:10-17: ‘Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me! Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.’

- ❑ It is quite interesting that Luke states that Paul and Barnabas ‘strengthened the souls of the disciples...by saying, ‘Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God.’
- ❑ The modern preacher often sees such words as unnecessary, depressing, and potentially ‘turn off’ to ‘perspective’ believers. Yet, for Paul, it was not only a reality, but, indeed the source of great joy, that he would be deemed worthy to be so closely associated with his Lord that he would suffer as His Lord did.

- ❑ John Calvin commented, ‘We must note that Paul and Barnabas being not content with the plural number, do plainly set down many tribulations, lest any man, after he hath suffered one or two, or a few, do at length sink down. Therefore, let the faithful think that they must pass through continual miseries; that done, let them prepare themselves not for one kind of persecution only, but for divers kinds.’
- ❑ Not only this, but **throughout the Scriptures** it is quite clear that salvation ‘entering into the kingdom of God’ is **always** preceded by tribulations. Such was the case in the in the Old Testament in the life of Joseph, in the Passover and Exodus, and in the return from Babylonian captivity. Yet, it finds its supreme fulfillment in the trials, suffering and death of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- ❑ As Hebrews 12:3 states, ‘For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.’

3. The third way in which Paul and Barnabas encouraged the new believers was by **appointing for them elders in every church.**

- ❑ It is noteworthy that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders [PLURAL] in every church [SINGULAR].
- ❑ Paul and Barnabas, from recent first-hand experience, knew all too well the human tendency to glorify men. Therefore, it should be of no surprise to anyone that he ‘appointed elders in every city.’

Alexander Strauch, in his book, *Biblical Eldership*, states:

...biblical eldership guards and promotes the preeminence and position of Christ over the local church...Because the apostles knew that Jesus Christ, by the Holy Spirit, was uniquely present with them as Ruler, Head, Lord, Pastor, Master, Overseer, High Priest, and King, they chose a form of government that reflected this distinctive, fundamental, Christian truth. This concept was no theoretical idea to the early Christians – it was reality. The first churches were truly Christ-centered, Christ-dependent churches.

...in the first century, no Christian would dare take the position or title of sole ruler, overseer, or pastor of the church. We Christians today, however, are so accustomed to speaking of “the pastor” that we do not stop to realize that the New Testament does not...There is only one flock and one Pastor (John 10:16), one body and one Head (Col. 1:18), one holy priesthood and one great High Priest (Heb. 4:14ff.), one brotherhood and one Elder Brother (Rom. 8:29), one building and one Cornerstone (1 Peter 2:5ff.), one Mediator, one Lord. Jesus Christ is “Senior Pastor,” and all others are His undershepherds (1 Peter 5:4).

- ❑ As the prominent Anglican theologian John Stott states [concerning the practice of appointing multiple elders in each church], ‘We notice that it was both local and plural – local in that the elders were chosen from within the congregation, not imposed from without, and plural in that the familiar modern pattern of ‘one pastor one church’ was simply unknown.’

- ❑ Thus, the apostolic model of church governance was clear: **multiple elders in each church were charged with the explicit duty of preserving and imparting the teachings of the apostles [‘the faith’] to their respective local congregations.**
- ❑ Stott continues, ‘Such was Paul’s double – and only – human provision for these young churches: on the one hand a standard of doctrinal and ethical instruction, safeguarded by the Old Testament and the apostles’ letters, and on the other pastors to teach the people out of these written resources and to care for them in the name of the Lord. Just the Scriptures and the pastorate; that was all...’

4. Yet, there was a fourth and final provision, instituted by Paul and Barnabas: **they commended the new believers to the Lord in whom they believed.**

- ❑ Ultimately, the early missionaries were called to trust that the Lord, who was the One who began the work in the lives of these believers, would be the one who would carry it on to completion [Philippians 1:6].
- ❑ Paul and Barnabas had been used by God to plant and begin the churches, and it was time for them to move on.
- ❑ As John MacArthur writes, ‘Such an attitude acknowledges the Lord Jesus Christ as the head of the church and the source of all truth and power.’

IV. Paul and Barnabas Complete their First Missionary Journey

- ❑ After encouraging the believers in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, Paul and Barnabas [**Verses 24-26**], ‘passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia...spoke the word in Perga...and went down to Attalia. From there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished.’
- ❑ The two missionaries had come ‘full circle.’ They had completed the task before them. They had faced persecution; yet, they remained fixed on their God-given mission. Tragically, few of us ever complete the God-given tasks before us, because we, unlike the first two missionaries, fix our eyes on our circumstances rather than our Lord who called us to the task.
- ❑ This passage brings to an end that which God [the Holy Spirit] had begun in Acts 13:2, when He said, ‘Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’
- ❑ They had traveled a great distance, been gone approximately a year [maybe more], and they reported back to the local church in Antioch, since it was this local church that sent them out.

Paul's First Missionary Journey

<u>City</u>	<u>Region</u>
Antioch	Syria
Salamis	Cyprus
Paphos	Cyprus
Perga	Pamphylia
Pisidian Antioch	Pisidia
Iconium	Lycaonia
Lystra	Lycaonia
Derbe	Lycaonia
Lystra	Lycaonia
Derbe	Lycaonia
Iconium	Lycaonia
Pisidian Antioch	Pisidia
Perga	Pamphylia
Attalia	Pamphylia
Antioch	Syria

- In **Verse 27**, Luke writes, 'When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.'
 - Notice, here, the report given in Scriptures does not include numbers. Rather, what they reported that was of such significance was that God's will was accomplished, and this is what encouraged them.
 - Paul declares authoritatively to the church at Antioch that the door of faith was indeed open to the Gentiles. Christ's words in Acts 1:8 were being fulfilled in their midst!
- As it was the Holy Spirit who sent out the missionaries from Antioch, and it was He who brought them safely back, the first missionary journey exists as a powerful, real-world example of God's words through the prophet Isaiah: 'So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire. And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it' [Isaiah 55:11].
 - And, indeed, God's word did go forth, and it did accomplish all that He desired. It saved many people. It caused division. It led to the stoning of Paul. And in all of this, God's eternal glory was revealed!
- May we, today, be able to echo some of Paul's last words to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:7: 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith...'