

The Gospel in Gentile Territory

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Date: 26 June 2016

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[0 : 00] And I'd ask you to turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 14.! We'll read the entire chapter. Acts chapter 14.

! 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 mistreat them and stone them.

But they found out about it and fled to the Lycian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, where they continued to preach the good news.

In Lystra, there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul as he was speaking.

[1 : 20] 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.

When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycian language, The gods have come down to us in human form! Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker.

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.

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.

[2 : 19] 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.

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.

But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day, he and Barnabas left for Derbe. They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples.

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.

[3 : 25] 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.

After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Atalia. From Atalia, they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.

On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them, and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

And they stayed there a long time with the disciples. Jesus Christ is building his church, and he is using Gentile material to do so, like you and like me.

Now, that wasn't always the case. There was a time when the church of God was being built out of Jews, almost exclusively.

[4 : 33] It was to the Jew first, and then later to the Gentile, the non-Jew. And that transition to include the Gentiles was a huge step for the church of Christ.

And here in the middle of Acts, we've been seeing the gospel as it advances beyond the boundaries and the racial distinctions from Jew to Gentile.

And especially we have seen how that a basically Gentile church was established up in Antioch of Syria. And how that Gentile church then sent out two of their own as missionaries to go right into the heart of Gentile territory.

Paul and Barnabas sent out on their first missionary journey. And what we're finding is that the gospel for the Jew is the same gospel for the Gentile. There is only one gospel.

There's only one Savior, Jesus Christ. Only one salvation in him, through faith in him. And so chapter 13 began that missionary journey, the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas.

[5 : 50] Today we're in chapter 14, and we'll see it come to a completion. And what we notice is a repeated pattern, first of all.

There's a pattern. And what we saw in chapter 13 in Pisidian Antioch, we'll see repeated in chapter 14. And then later on the second and third missionary journeys, we'll see the same pattern.

And here's the pattern. I've broken it down into four steps. When coming into a city, if there was a Jewish synagogue present, Paul and Barnabas would preach the gospel there.

He would preach first to the Jews, using their own scriptures to convince them that Jesus of Nazareth is that long-promised Messiah that the Old Testament scriptures spoke of.

And they would call men to faith and repentance, trusting in the Savior for eternal life. Well, that's the first part. The response was that some believed, often many.

[6 : 54] And that created, number two, jealousy and persecution from the Jewish leaders as they saw their own crowd dwindling and the Jesus crowd swelling.

They got jealous and they started to persecute Paul and Barnabas. Third step. Paul and Barnabas would then turn from the Jews who were pushing them out of the synagogue and would turn to the Gentiles.

And would offer forgiveness of sins and eternal life to them through faith in Jesus Christ. And usually the result was more Gentiles coming to faith in Christ.

That brings us to the fourth rung of the pattern. The unbelieving Jews would then stir up the Gentiles to persecute the missionaries and to drive them out of town.

And so Paul and Barnabas would move on to the next city. Now that's what happened in Pisidian Antioch in chapter 13. If we could have the map, please, at this time, it would help us then to see where we're at.

[7:59] They were up here in Pisidian Antioch. In chapter 13, they now have moved on to Iconium. And here they preached once again in the synagogue as was their pattern. And a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. Now again, we want to notice that it was the religious Jews, not the pagan Gentiles, that were the instigators in the persecution against the gospel. And this persecution began with poisoning the minds of the Gentiles against Paul and Barnabas. How do you poison the mind of someone? Well, you spread slanderous reports about them. You spread false accusations. You say, you know what their motives are, and then you put some bad motive into them. And so they were stirring up ill thoughts and ill feelings against the messengers of the gospel, poisoning the minds of people.

[9:14] You see, Satan knows that if he can sour the people against the messengers of Jesus, then they will not pay attention to their message, the gospel. And I wonder, have you not noticed that same thing yourself? That what you think of something is often connected to what you think about the person saying it. Have you seen the connection? Maybe it's a politician that you do not like very well. And it means that you probably have a hard time liking anything that comes out of their mouth. You see, we tend to color the message by the messenger. And Satan knows that, and so he was poisoning the minds of the people against the messengers of the gospel so that they will discount their message. Well, it would take more than slander to run Paul and Barnabas out of town. To quit now would only confirm the rumors about them.

[10:18] So they held their ground. They stood fast. They boldly preached the gospel message. They held nothing back. And the Lord Jesus was with them, we read. He was acting on behalf of his messengers. You see, he saw what was being done to undermine his gospel message. And so he did something to reinforce the message. They're trying to undermine the message by slandering the messengers. Jesus did something to reinforce the message. And what was it? He confirmed the message of his grace by enabling its messengers to do miraculous signs and wonders. To do things that only God could do. And thereby prove that their message was from God. And ought to be heeded. And so the Jews' poison was countered by Jesus' power.

[11:16] And the result was that the number of converts increased. But so did the persecution from the Jews. The Jewish leaders laid plans with the Gentiles to stone Paul and Barnabas. In other words, if they couldn't poison the minds of everyone, they would silence them with their stones. But the Lord Jesus had more work for Paul and Barnabas. There were more sinners to be saved by the message of his grace. And so they found out about the plot. And they fled to the next city. Lystra. Some 18 miles to the south of Iconium. Where they will again preach the gospel. What did they leave behind? Up in Iconium, they left some disciples. And they left some bloodthirsty Jews that wanted them dead. Well, do you see how the pattern is being repeated?

[12:29] It's a new place. Iconium, not Pisidian, Antioch. But it's the same message and we see the same responses. Now, before we move on, I want us to consider three truths about the gospel that come to light here in Iconium.

Three truths about the gospel. First, the gospel is a message about the grace of Jesus. Do you see that in verse 3? Verse 3 speaks of the Lord who confirmed the message of his grace.

Isn't that a beautiful and fitting title for the gospel? The message of Jesus' grace. You see, the law tells us God is holy and you are a sinner.

And there's hell to pay for your sin against God. That's the message of the law that condemns sinners with sin for our sin and guilt against him.

But the gospel is a message about the grace of Jesus Christ. That it was grace that brought him out of heaven. It was grace that brought him to perfectly keep the law of God for his people.

[13:41] And then to suffer the punishment that our sins deserved. It was grace that then invites us now to come to him and to trust in him.

And that if we come, he will receive us. And he will forgive us. And he will save us. He was condemned that we might never be if we put our trust in him.

That's grace. He will not treat us as our sins deserve. But rather, he will forgive us. And give us eternal life.

You see, the chief characteristic of the gospel, of the gospel message, is grace. It's the grace of Jesus. The wonderful grace of Jesus. That tells us Jesus is full of grace.

More full of grace than we are of sin. That where sin abounded, grace super abounded. You see, the message of the gospel, the message of grace is not, you know, Jesus will save you if you're good enough.

[14:52] If you keep the law enough. No. The message of the gospel is about the grace of Jesus that says you haven't pleased God. He's displeased with you.

He's angry. His wrath is upon you. But Jesus will take that wrath in place of sinners. He has come to earth and died for his people. That's grace.

That he would rather himself be damned than that his people be damned. What a message of grace. It's God's riches at Christ's expense.

That's what the grace of God is. Free to you. But it's such a cost to Jesus Christ. I wonder, have you received the gracious gift of eternal life from Jesus Christ?

Is it not a wonder that such a message of grace, from such a king of grace, is it not one of the wonders of the world that people would reject the message of grace, the gospel?

[15:59] We need nothing else to prove the depravity of man than just that. That God comes with an offer of grace, salvation, free gift, and men reject it.

That's the first lesson about the gospel. It's a message of Jesus' grace. Secondly, the gospel divides people into two camps, wherever it is clearly preached.

Iconium had never been so divided. Verse 4 says, the people of the city were divided. Some sided with the Jews against the gospel of Christ, while others sided with the apostles for the gospel.

And everybody ranged behind one of these two groups. You know, the gospel of Christ has always been the great divider. It divides marriages.

It divides families. It divides whole cities. And we see it here. Divides them into two groups.

[17:00] Those who embrace the gospel of grace. And those who reject it. Now, whenever the gospel goes out and people understand it, people take their sides, either for it or against it.

It leaves none neutral, none in the middle ground. It leaves you either embracing it and believing it, or it leaves you in disbelief, rejecting it. Just as we saw back at Pisidian Antioch, the gospel message, the good news either left men glad or mad.

So it is with the gospel. It's a straight line. When it's preached clearly, it draws a straight line. And all humanity line up on either side. And that's the two sides of humanity that will meet up again on the last day of judgment.

On the right and on the left of Jesus Christ. No middle ground. Well, let's look at the camp against the gospel. It's really quite a mixture, isn't it?

It's a broad tent. And in this broad tent, we find Jews, monotheists, with their Old Testament scriptures. They worship one God. But in the same tent, they've got polytheists, pagans, idolaters, worshiping many gods.

[18:17] But the thing they have in common is that they are against the gospel of Jesus. They will not bow to King Jesus and trust in him for salvation.

And then in this camp, there are also many differences. The camp for the gospel. There's different colors of skin.

There's different ages. There's young and old. There's men and women, boys and girls. Different backgrounds of education and economics. And different religious backgrounds even.

Different morality. Some are very proper, upstanding citizens. Others are low-down, wicked people in their former lives.

And yet here they are. And the thing that they have in common is that they have put all their trust in Jesus Christ. They've embraced the good news of the grace of God. And so we have these two camps.

[19:19] These over here with faith in Jesus Christ. And it's a faith. It's a faith that works by love. It's a faith that overcomes the world.

It's a faith that purifies the heart. It's a faith that looks to Jesus and finds in him all that they need. It's a faith that obeys God's commands. Jesus and his gospel are still dividing humanity into two groups.

Which group are you in this morning? Are you in the group of embracing the gospel? Are you still in the group of rejecting the gospel? You say, well, I've never done anything. Then you're still rejecting it.

We're all born lost. And we need to move by repentance and faith to embrace the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Come and trust the gracious promise. And you will be translated out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of his dear son. Yes, the gospel divides people into two groups.

[20:25] The last thing we want to note on the gospel is that it spreads by means of persecution. It spreads by means of persecution.

Now, the Jews were privileged to be the first to hear the gospel of the grace of Jesus. So they should have been the first to embrace it and to pass it on to Gentiles.

But sadly, it was the Jews and especially their leaders who rejected it and persecuted the gospel messengers. Not the pagan Gentiles.

They were not the ones to persecute. But only as they were stirred up by the Jews. Now, it was always this way. Of all the persecutions, you can read the list of Paul's sufferings.

He suffered a lot. And of all the persecution that Paul suffered, it was always the unbelieving Jews behind it. The only two exceptions were the persecutions he received at Philippi and Ephesus.

[21:28] And we'll see those two exceptions. But otherwise, it was always instigated by the Jews. No wonder Paul would write to the Thessalonians in second chapter, first letter, and speak of the Jews who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out.

They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way, they always fill up their sins to the limit.

Not only did they refuse to enter the kingdom, but they shut up the gospel so nobody else could enter. They didn't want these gospel messengers to go and to offer the blessings, the good things of God to people simply who would trust in Jesus Christ.

Not these Gentile dogs who are without the law and without the holiness that they thought of themselves as having. Yes, the gospel messengers were persecuted by the Jews.

And surely behind this is Satan himself. Satan does not want people to hear the saving message of God's grace in Jesus Christ. Do you know he's working to keep you from paying attention to that message if you're lost?

[22:51] He wants you damned. And he has earthly minions, earthly messengers who carry out that word to distract you from the one thing needful for you, that you embrace Jesus as your Savior and Lord.

What a horrible enemy Satan is. He doesn't want you saved in worshiping Jesus. So here's the Jews persecuting the messengers of the gospel.

And yet the Lord Jesus overrules and overturns this persecution and actually uses it to spread his gospel even further. We saw that in chapter 8. It was persecution in Jerusalem that first sent the gospel out beyond Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and started it on the way to the ends of the earth.

And that's what we see here. The same thing. It was persecution that was brought to them up in Pisidian Antioch. It sends it down to Iconium and it will send it from Iconium down to Lystra and so on.

It's the same pattern. Jesus Christ uses persecution to spread the good news of his grace. Persecution is the wind that scatters the cottonwood seeds of the gospel and speeds the gospel on its way to the next city and the next city.

[24:12] This is our sovereign king building his church. Taking what Satan means for evil. Even over there in China this week. What Satan means for evil, Jesus Christ will use for good.

And will build his kingdom. And will do the highest good. The salvation of others for the glory of his own name.

So, those three truths about the gospel. Now, they move on to Lystra then.

They're down here in Lystra. And here at Lystra, I want us to see three truths about mankind. Doesn't seem that there was a synagogue here. Maybe not many Jews. Not enough, perhaps, for a synagogue. And the first thing we learn about mankind is that man is more prone to worship the creature than the creator.

Now, here again, the Lord was confirming the message of his grace by enabling his messengers to work amazing signs and wonders. Here's a man.

[25:19] And he's crippled on both feet. He's been that way from birth. Everybody in Lystra knew. The cripple? Oh, yeah.

Yeah. They'd seen him sitting around. Perhaps begging. He couldn't work. Had to be carried everywhere.

Lame on both feet. Never walked. And he is the one listening as Paul is preaching. He's listening to the message.

And Paul is given grace of the spirit to see that this man has faith to be healed. And so he shouts. In a loud voice, he says to this man, stand up on your feet so that everybody will hear.

This is a command of the messenger of Jesus Christ to this born cripple. Stand up on your feet. And immediately the man jumped up and started walking around.

[26 : 17] Well, the response in the crowd was electric. They'd never seen anything like this before. It was clearly divine. And so they cried out in their native language, the gods have come down to us in human form.

And they think that Barnabas must be Zeus and Paul must be Hermes. They must be gods. How else could they do these things? Now, there seems to be some confusion here that Paul and Barnabas did not understand the Lationian language.

They were preaching in Greek and a lot of people understood the common Greek. But now they're speaking Lationian, their own dialect, their own language. And Paul and Barnabas don't seem to understand what they were saying.

It would be only as the priest of Zeus comes from the temple of Zeus with his wreath-laden bulls ready to do sacrifice to them as gods that somehow they understood what was about to happen.

These men are about to offer sacrifices to us as if we are gods. And they tore their clothes. Remember the high priest did that when Jesus claimed to be God. They tore their clothes.

[27 : 35] It's a sign of horror at the sacrilege, the blasphemy that is about to happen. And they rushed into the crowds and they shouted to them. Men, why are you doing this?

We're only men, human like you. We can't heal this man any more than you can. God did this and we are not God. No, we're just messengers, he says.

We're just his messengers bringing you the good news. Good news telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God who made heaven and earth, sea and everything in them.

Oh, the worthless things that men worship instead of God, the creator, the living God. And so they said to them, your supposed gods, these supposed gods of yours are really no gods.

They're phantoms, they're fantasies, they're vanities, they're lies, they're imaginary gods. Your gods are worthless. Turn from them.

[28 : 39] And so are your idols. They're just chunks of metal and wood that cannot hear, cannot answer prayer. They can't help themselves in trouble, let alone those who worship them.

They need chains to hold them up, to keep them from toppling in a strong wind. How can they help you? Worthless things.

And so are your sacrifices. They cannot save you. They cannot make you right with God. Stop this meaningless worship of created things.

Stop your sacrifice. Don't make any more of your worthless sacrifices, but rather trust in the one effective sacrifice for sin. It was not made by men offering sacrifices to God.

It was God making that sacrifice by sacrificing his son to save men. Your sacrifice, your gods, your idols, they're all worthless.

[29 : 42] Turn from your worthless idols to the God who lives, who can do something, who created everything that you see. That's the gospel.

That's good news. He says, this is the good news. Isn't it good news to trade worthless gods, idols, sacrifices for the living God, for the one sacrifice, for sin that really saves and makes people right with God forever and ever?

You see, the gospel includes the call to turn from your worthless worship. The things you are living for. The things that you get up in the morning for.

The things that you pursue instead of God. All your God's substance. You must turn from them. You must turn your back on them. And you must come to the living God through faith in the one sacrifice made for sinners.

But what a trade. That's grace. To get rid of your worthless objects of worship and to receive the living God as your God.

[30 : 50] Paul's directing their worship away from created things to their creator. How sad that men have fallen to worshiping worthless things that cannot save. Sin has programmed men to worship anything but the living God.

Here they are. On a moment's notice, ready to offer sacrifices and bow down and worship Paul and Barnabas as if they were gods. How far have we come, brothers and sisters, that men would worship mortals instead of God?

And you know, it's not just a Lystra thing. Paul, writing in Romans 1, says it's a universal thing about mankind. Left to himself. Romans 1, 21.

For although they knew God. How did they know God? All men know God through the light of nature. God has made himself known to them in nature. And although they knew God.

They neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him. But their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. And although they claimed to be wise, they became fools. And exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal men, birds, animals, and reptiles.

[32 : 05] They exchanged the truth of God for a lie. And worshipped and served created things rather than the creator who is forever blessed. Amen.

You see what Paul is saying about men? Leave them to themselves. And what happens? They exchanged the truth they knew about God from creation. For a lie.

And they started to live and worship and serve created things. Rather than the glorious creator. The true and living God. Well, there's plenty of worthless things being worshipped today.

And I'll tell you what they all have in common. They are created things rather than the creator. This is true in our day as it was in Lystra's day.

Let me just give one example. The living God has called people to worship him in his churches on this, his day of worship. To give him the thanks, the glory, the honor that is his due.

[33 : 11] Where is mankind today? Where do you find him? As a whole, you won't find them in church, worshipping God as he is ordained through Jesus Christ.

Where then? Out enjoying something that he created. Created things. Giving to them what God demands for himself.

The love and trust and delight and loyalty and first place in their hearts. To seek his kingdom and his righteousness first.

The priority place. And if this is true on the Lord's day of worship, we can be sure that the rest of the week is no different. Men worship and serve created things rather than the creator.

And that's at the very heart of the problem of man. That's at the very center of sin. What sin is? It's taking from God and giving it to created things. What is only God's?

[34 : 17] Well, secondly, those who do not worship their creator are guilty of the highest ingratitude. Paul goes on to tell them, in the past, this living God let all nations go their own way.

He gave his revelation to Israel. And he left the nations with just the light of nature to go their own way. And what was the way they went?

Well, they all went their own way with their back to God and serving and worshiping created things. Living for things of this earth that God has created.

But not worshiping the living God. That's what happens when God let all nations go their own way. They all went astray. And God patiently put up with it.

But now he commands all people everywhere to repent and to come to his son. And to turn from their worthless things to the worship of Jesus Christ.

[35 : 20] But you know, even when God let all nations go their own way without the scriptures, he still did not leave them entirely without testimony. Paul says he was witnessing to you.

He was witnessing to you in the rain. The rain, by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons, he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.

Now, Zeus was their God of rain. And Paul says, nonsense, worthless. No, it was the living God that I'm telling you about, the creator who gave you rain from heaven and crops and plenty of food.

And every single joy that you have, it comes from him. There is enough light in creation to make you aware of your obligation to thank him and to worship him, to live for him.

God in kindness has not withheld these many blessings from you, yet you withhold the gratitude and worship of your heart from him. That's what makes your rebellion so serious.

[36 : 25] You rejected the God who blessed you and his daily blessing you. And instead, you give your heart and worship to other things. Well, even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrifice.

Are these some hard words? Get rid of your worthless idols and sacrifice. That's hard for a crowd to receive, isn't it?

That's hard preaching. That what you and your fathers have been doing for generations, it's all worthless. It's an offense to the living God. So get rid of it and come and worship the living God through Jesus Christ, his son.

And you talk about offensive preaching, and yet, even with such words, they barely were able to keep these people from sacrificing to them as gods.

Well, then some Jews came from Antioch. From Antioch, 100 miles down to Lystra.

[37 : 28] You talk about antagonism to the gospel. This isn't jump in the car. This is walk, or donkey, or horse. 100 miles, these Jews came from Antioch. And they gathered up some Jews here who had a plot to kill Paul and Barnabas.

And together, they came down to Lystra. And there, they won the crowd over. That's the language Luke uses. Don't know what they did.

But somehow, they convinced the crowd that Paul does not deserve to live another day. And so they stoned Paul. And when they could no longer see any signs of life, they just drug him out of the city and left him for dead.

They thought he was dead. And I want you to draw from this the truth about mankind, that the heart of man is fickle. Fickle.

Changeable. Like a ship without a rudder or anchor. They're blown this way and then that way. At one moment, they're ready to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas as gods.

[38 : 28] At the next moment, they're pelting the life out of Paul with rocks and stones. That's the heart of the crowd. First bringing their sacrifices.

And a bit later, their stones. Like the crowd in Jerusalem that brought their hosannas to Jesus as he rode into Jerusalem. And a few days later, greeted him with crucify him.

Crucify him. The crowd. So fickle. So changeable. And yet, some of you are living for the favor of the crowd.

Some of you would live to have the crowd smile at you and to applaud you and for them to be pleased with you. These who can be sacrificing to you in one moment and stoning you the next.

Can you not see that their praise is worthless? That the only praise that means anything is the praise that comes from the one and only God? Man is fickle.

[39 : 29] Man is fickle. Seeking the praise of the crowd rather than the praise of God. Well, the disciples gathered around the limp body of Paul.

Looked dead. I don't believe that it's... It doesn't say he was dead, but he was barely ticking. Didn't look like. Didn't have the visible signs of life.

But don't read over that phrase. The disciples gathered around Paul. Did you hear that? What a testimony to the power of the gospel that won disciples to Jesus.

Even in godless, idolatrous, persecuting Lystra of all places. And one of those disciples in Lystra was a young teenage boy named Timothy.

Who would later become a preacher of the same message of the grace of Jesus. Right alongside of this man who now is lying lifeless looking in front of him.

[40 : 35] But while he was lying there, quite miraculously, Paul got up and went back into the city.

Now, I'm not sure which is more amazing. That he got up or that he went back into the city that stoned him. Or that he headed out the next day to go over to Derby.

And you put in a good day's work and you're ready for a day off. And Paul's been stoned and left for dead. And the next day he's on to the next city.

The Lord. You see, we don't learn from that. It's hard to keep a good man down. No, no. We learn it's hard to fight against Jesus Christ and win. Jesus is building his church. He's got more people to save through the preaching of his grace.

Through this, his messenger, Paul. And he comes and he heals and strengthens and sends him on his way. And on down to Derby he goes.

[41 : 34] Where he preached the good news. And we're told he won a large number of disciples. Now, that's as far as they got on this first missionary journey into the heart of Asia.

And we close quickly with the return trip. And I want you to look at the map. All right. They come all the way from their home church in Antioch of Syria.

And come around this way and up and over and down and over here. Now, they're just a relatively short distance. Two to three hundred miles from Derby to Antioch.

But what we notice is that they don't take the short route from Derby to Antioch. But they rather retrace their steps and go back the way they came.

Not going to the island of Cyprus. But otherwise, they retrace their steps all the way back to Antioch. Not only was this not the shortest route, it was not the safest route either, was it?

[42 : 41] There were bloodstained stones in Lystra that matched the marks on Paul's body right here. And yet, that's where they started out, back to Lystra.

And there were further stones at Iconium that had Paul and Barnabas' names on them. With a plot to stone them. And as for the city in Antioch, those are the ones that were so hating Paul and Barnabas, that they would travel a hundred miles just to stir up the Gentiles to stone him.

And then make another hundred miles to go home. In other words, what I'm telling you is the path that they took was not likely to bring them to a lot of welcome wagons at the city gate.

Rather, they could expect stones to jeopardize their lives. Why in the world then would they risk their lives to go back this way?

It must be something very important. We dare not miss it. Verse 22 tells us why. They did it to strengthen and encourage the disciples to remain true to the faith.

[43 : 59] To strengthen and encourage disciples to remain true to the faith. According to Jesus Christ, only those who endure to the end of their life will be saved.

And Paul and Barnabas believed that with all their heart. That it's one thing to take an initial stand for Jesus. It is another thing altogether.

To remain true to the faith all the way to the end of your life. And there were precious disciples of Jesus that he had left behind in Lystra, Iconium, Antioch, and elsewhere.

Precious disciples of Jesus in these cities that needed encouragement to persevere to the end. To remain true to the end. And especially did they need encouragement against all the persecutions that they could expect to find as Christians in their home cities.

Pressures and temptations to forsake their faith. To forsake the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is why Paul and Barnabas would retrace their steps the long way home.

[45 : 07] The dangerous route home. Jeopardizing their very lives. At issue are the eternal lives of these disciples of Jesus Christ. And dear believer, I want you to go home realizing that every single one of us needs the ongoing strengthening and encouraging to remain true to the faith.

Many start out that don't finish. You know that. Maybe many others started with you and are no more following Jesus. They fizzled out.

Many turned back to the world. Many are no longer following and obeying Jesus Christ and are lost. Showing that they never were saved. And so, every one of us needs the regular, continuing, strengthening, and encouragement to remain true to the end.

How did they strengthen and encourage the disciples to persevere? Well, two ways. First, by preparing them for hardships. They told them. Here's the summary of their words as they went back through these cities.

We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God. Hardships, pressures, tribulations, troubles. We've got to go through them. It's the normal lot for any Christian on his way to heaven.

[46 : 27] All who go to heaven must expect tribulation on the way. So don't be surprised when they come into your life. There's a cross that every disciple must take up.

Some suffering. Something to be born for Christ's sake. So don't be surprised when it happens. Jesus said, in this world, you will have tribulation. Same word, hardship.

There's a divine necessity to our hardships. As we're making our way to heaven, we must go through many hardships. There's a must, a divine necessity to these.

So we should not be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. It's those who suffer with Christ who will also share in his glory.

Romans 8, 17. So I must needs go home by the way of the cross. There's no other way. No other way home.

[47 : 24] The way of the cross leads home. No cross, no crown. 2 Timothy 2, 12. You say, is this any way to strengthen and encourage disciples, newborn disciples, to remain true?

To tell them of the many hardships in the Christian life? This is encouraging? This is strengthening? Yes. Nothing is more discouraging to believers than to be misled about the Christian life.

To be told that if you come to Christ, your life will be smooth sailing and all your troubles behind you. Just health, wealth, and prosperity to the end. Happy, happy, happy.

And then the hardships. And the cost of being a Christian in a family that rejects Jesus. And the cost of being a Christian in that workplace, in that community.

That cross comes into the life. And the poor person thinks, have I lost my way? Am I on the wrong path? Am I not going the right way?

[48 : 34] Am I not going to say, I thought life in Christ was to be without troubles. And now they're discouraged. And now they're ready to throw in the towel. Now they're bewildered.

Where is Christ? I thought, where's the promised blessing? You see, to expect many trials is the first preparation for them.

So that when they arrive, you are not bewildered and blown away by them. But rather encouraged to know that these are sign markers along the way to heaven.

This is par for the course. This is part of the hardship on the narrow road to heaven. And at the end of this journey, there is the everlasting kingdom of God.

In other words, the hardships don't go on forever. That too is part of his encouragement and strengthening. That at last the march shall end. The weary ones shall rest. The pilgrims reach their father's house.

[49 : 31] Jerusalem the blessed. So rejoice. It is sweet to know as I onward go. That the way of the cross leads home. I'm going home.

And where I'm going, it were a well-spent journey. Those seven deaths lay between. Though I've got to go through tribulation, hardship, pressures, troubles. Seven deaths.

To get to heaven. To enter the kingdom of God. Oh, blessed grace of Jesus. They strengthened and encouraged the disciples to persevere.

To remain true to the end. First of all, by preparing them for hardships. And secondly, by establishing churches with proper leadership. They appointed elders in every church. As they wended their way back and gathered these disciples together.

Into local churches that they organized with elders in every church. Do you know that's the plan of Jesus? To gather his disciples into organized local churches.

[50 : 30] With elders who can continually strengthen and teach you and encourage you. After the missionary is long gone and back home in Antioch. Antioch, it is home church.

There are shepherds, elders, guarding, keeping, encouraging, strengthening the disciples of Jesus to remain true to the end.

Don't neglect the local church. Don't neglect the local church and its elders who are set to encourage you to persevere to the end.

That's Christ's gift to keep you faithful to the end. Paul and Barnabas risked their lives to see churches organized with elders to do eternal good.

From Jesus' grace through his church to his disciples. Well, at last they arrived back at their home church in Antioch. It was the church that sent them.

[51 : 30] It was the church that met together to pray for them. It was the church that sent them financially on their way. And so now as their work is completed, it is the church to whom they return to give a report of their completed mission.

Do you have an interest in the reports from the mission field? Do you pray for the missionaries and their causes? Is that kingdom of Christ your first priority?

You are looking to see the gospel penetrate the darkness of this world. And you're praying and financially giving because that's why you're here. To advance the cause of Christ in the earth.

That's what we find at Antioch. So they gathered together. And what did Paul and Barnabas say? They told them what God had done through them.

That's God-centered missions. God does the work. But he does it through his servants. Both are important to grasp.

[52 : 40] God must do the work. We sow in other waters, but God must give the increase. And the lesson is all is vain unless the spirit of the Holy One comes down.

So brethren, pray. Pray. Because God must do the work. They reported what God had done. But he does it through us. We don't just sit on our hands and say, Okay, God's got to do it.

So we're waiting for him. No, we must be going, sending, praying, giving. Because he does it through us. We have the wonderful privilege of laboring together with Christ.

To see sinners brought by the gospel of Jesus' grace. To the forgiveness of sins and to eternal life. Well, this is just the first of several missionary journeys.

And Paul will later write and say, I have on my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Some of them were applied to his body on this first missionary journey.

[53 : 47] I mean, he's getting hit over and over from his Jewish brethren. What kept him sweet? What kept him going?

What kept him dragging himself together to go on to the next city to preach to more Jews? What kept him with a spirit that could write, My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved.

He's not praying curses down upon the Jews. He's pleading with God to save them. And he's laboring to bring them the gospel. What kept Paul going?

Well, you see, he too was a Jew who once fought against the gospel of Jesus Christ. And did everything in his power.

I too was a persecutor, a blasphemer, and a violent man. But God had mercy upon me. Paul had been treated not as his sins deserve, but with grace from Jesus Christ.

[54 : 55] And now he's taking that grace. And he's bringing it to his fellow Jews. And then to the Gentile world saying, Here is a Savior. Here is a living God you can know who can truly save you.

Who can make you righteous. Who can change your everlasting destination from hell to heaven. Who can forgive you and adopt you into his family. Who can make you a new creature.

And he gives this eternal life as a free gift. Come and welcome to Jesus. It was the wonderful grace of Jesus that saved Paul. That kept him going.

And brothers and sisters, that's the kind of thing that will motivate us. To live. And to seek first the kingdom of Christ. And his righteousness. To long to see our neighbors here.

And folks on the other side of the world. Come to know the grace that we have known. Would you take your hymnal and let's sing of this wonderful grace of Jesus. Our gracious master, we thank you that this message of Jesus' grace has reached us.

[56 : 01] All the way from Jerusalem to our home. Thank you that in Jesus we see God's grace lived out before us. Laying down his life in our stead.

Giving to us a righteousness. That will put us in good standing with you for time and eternity. And all because of grace. Because of his love.

We thank you Jesus. This grace that we see in Paul was first found in you. You are the one that found us. Everyone. Lost and going our own way.

Turned our backs upon you. And worshipped. Created things. Worthless things. Instead of you. And yet you did not crush us.

You did not come to condemn us but to save us. How we bless you for your grace. It was you who wept over Jerusalem sinners. So stubborn in their resistance of you.

[57 : 01] It was you who from the cross cried, Father forgive them for they know not what they are doing. And it was that same grace that our brother Paul tasted of.

Oh we see what a difference it made in him. And we desire. We who have tasted that same grace. We want it to be changing us more and more into the same likeness of Jesus.

Fill us with your grace. And draw others this day to no more reject the message of your grace. To go on their way home.

Right with God through Jesus Christ. We ask it in his name and for his praise. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.