

Introduction

1. After being forced out of Iconium after an attempted stoning, Paul and Barnabas head south into the Roman province of Lycaonia which included the cities of Lystra and Derbe (Lystra is ultimately where Paul met Timothy)
2. While in Lystra, they begin to preach the Gospel (v. 7) and as we should expect based on what we've seen in the book of Acts so far, they have a fruitful ministry but also encounter some challenges, opposition, and persecution
3. When studying a passage, we always have to ask what the author's purpose was in writing it:
 - a. When it comes to epistles like many of Paul's writings it's a bit easier because the purpose for the letter is often included in the letter by the author
 - b. However, when it comes to narratives like the book of Acts, it's a bit more challenging sometimes to figure out why the authors include specific events because they don't always tell us
 - c. Sometimes, however, they give us a clue and I believe that's the case with today's passage
 - d. Luke includes a statement by the Apostle Paul in our passage that provides a clue as to why he recorded these events, and it defines our theme for today
4. The theme for today is that it is necessary for us to go through tribulation in order to enter the kingdom of God:
 - a. In the first part of our passage today, we see how tribulation sometimes just involves the difficulty we face in preaching the Gospel to the world around us
 - b. In the second part of our passage, we see how tribulation sometimes comes through persecution
 - c. In the final part, we see how Paul and Barnabas helped equip the Church to face such tribulation

A. Sometimes, tribulation simply involves the difficulty we face in preaching the Gospel (14:8-18)

1. It begins with the healing of a man who cannot walk (READ 14:8-10):
 - a. He's been paralyzed and unable to walk since birth
 - b. But, as he's listening to Paul preach, Paul recognizes that the man "**had the faith to be made well**" (9):
 - 1) If your Bible has margin notes, you may have a note that indicates a more literal rendering of "**he had the faith to be saved**" and that's because Luke used the Greek word *sozo* (to save)
 - 2) However, the word has many uses including to save, rescue, deliver, and even heal so the context has to determine the meaning in any particular passage (we can't just assume it refers to salvation)
 - 3) Nearly all English translations use the words "**made well**" or "**healed**" here because that seems to be better supported by the context than salvation
 - 4) So, why might the man have believed he could be healed?
 - a) Paul and Barnabas were preaching about Jesus (e.g. the gospel; v. 7) and this likely included evidence for Him being the Son of God, including the miracles and healings He did in His earthly life (see Acts 2:22)

- b) He may have also been aware of the miracles Paul and Barnabas did in Iconium (14:3)
 - c. So, when Paul saw his faith, he healed him (10)—if this sounds familiar it’s because something similar happened with Peter and John in Acts 3; Luke even uses similar language in both events:
 - 1) Each account involves a man who was lame from his mother’s womb
 - 2) Both refer to Peter, John and Paul fixing their gaze upon the man
 - 3) They command both men to stand up and walk
 - 4) Luke describes both men as leaping up onto their feet
 - 5) A final similarity is in how the crowds respond
- 2. The crowd responds by attempting to deify and worship Paul and Barnabas (14:11-13):
 - a. Look back at Acts 3:11-12: when Peter and John healed the lame beggar, the crowd attributed the miracle to Peter’s and John’s “**own power or piety**” (e.g., their own abilities or godliness)
 - b. Now, let’s read Acts 14:11-13:
 - 1) The crowd here is Greek gentiles who were steeped in Roman and Greek mythology
 - 2) They immediately assumed that Paul and Barnabas were Greek gods who had come down and taken human form—specifically, Zeus (the main Greek god) and Hermes (who was the messenger of the Greek gods)
 - c. Both of these responses tell us something about human nature, and we see it throughout our world today:
 - 1) Mankind is prone to attribute the divine work of God to false gods, other means, and sometimes even people, rather than to God Himself
 - 2) Examples:
 - a) There are over 4000 different know religions in the world and billions of followers worshipping false gods
 - b) We have hundreds, maybe thousands, of cults led by men and women claiming to be gods
 - c) Miracles and direct acts of God are attributed to natural causes or false scientific theories like the Big Bang and evolution (many Christians even do this)
 - d) Secularists and atheists attribute everything to fate and chance
 - e) Unfortunately, we sometimes see a form of all this in the Church when people begin to essentially idolize certain Christian leaders:
 - 1) The Corinthians did this (“I am of Apollos, I am of Paul...”)
 - 2) It’s one thing to respect a competent, Godly leader; it’s another thing to put them up on a pedestal
 - 3) It becomes a form of idol worship because it’s often the result of giving them credit for something in which God should receive the credit

Man at bus stop who sold everything to come be in Rod Parsley’s presence

- 4) Unfortunately, many leaders fall prey to this and are more than happy to accept the credit, seemingly relishing it

James MacDonald declaring “I built this church” and threatening to destroy Harvest if removed; Marc Driscoll—new church, same issues.

- 3) All of these things suggest mankind does everything it can to avoid attributing the work of God to God Himself—this is not shocking because it is precisely what Romans 1:18-23 declares (READ)

3. However, Paul and Barnabas would have none of this when the crowds tried to deify them and attribute the miraculous healing to them (READ 14:14-18):
 - a. I was looking for the best word to use here to describe Paul’s and Barnabas’ reaction and thought of words like repulsion, disgust, aversion, maybe even horror, and all of these apply but the most appropriate would probably be grief
 - b. Look again at how they respond:
 - 1) The first thing they did was tear their clothes: tearing of the clothes in the ANE was an expression of grief which means Paul and Barnabas were grieved over the crowd’s response
 - 2) We see this grief expressed when they run out into the crowd and begin to plead with them:
 - a) They were grieved at the crowd’s attempt to deify them (READ 15a)
 - b) They were grieved that even after hearing the Gospel, the crowd continued to worship false gods (READ 15b)
 - c) They were grieved that the crowd hadn’t recognized the witness to Himself that God had provided (READ 16-17)

- 3) Even with all this pleading, it was barely enough to restrain the crowd from worshipping them (READ 18):
 - a) Luke wrote that it was “**with difficulty**” that they tried to restrain the crowds
 - b) It wasn’t easy trying to convince the crowds that they weren’t gods, and that they should abandon their idols and worship the Living God
 - c) That’s the nature of preaching the Gospel; it’s not easy when you’re facing an audience that’s hostile to it

B. Sometimes, tribulation comes through persecution (READ 14:19-20)

1. Paul actually refers to this event more than once in some of his epistles (2 Timothy 3:11; 2 Corinthians 11:25; Galatians 6:17)
2. It’s not clear if this event takes place at the same time as the event above—some scholars suggest it was sometime later but that’s not certain and really doesn’t matter
3. What is important, however, is that the Jews that attempt to kill Paul came from OUTSIDE Lystra:
 - a. These Jews came from Antioch and Iconium; they weren’t from Lystra and should have had no interest in what was happening to gentiles there
 - b. This actually becomes a pattern where Jews followed Paul, sometimes pursuing him and causing trouble, and at other times coming in after him to corrupt the new believers
 - c. This reminds me of what we see today with the Freedom From Religion Foundation and the LGBTQ mob that actually seeks out Christian targets to attack

4. What's more interesting to me, however, is what Paul does after he is almost killed (REREAD 20):
 - a. He got back up and walked into the city which showed an incredible amount of courage and faith
 - b. Now, mind you, he wasn't stupid; he left the next day so as not to give them a chance to finish the job

C. The final thing we see in our passage is how Paul and Barnabas used these experiences to help prepare the Church (READ 14:21-28)

1. After Paul and Barnabas finished their ministry in Derbe, instead of going directly back home to Antioch, they decided to take the LONG way home and go back through all the cities they had previously visited:
 - a. Antioch was only about 120 miles southwest of Derbe—their journey was like a circle, with Derbe at noon and Antioch at 2 o'clock
 - b. Instead of going clockwise (12 to 2) they went counterclockwise (12 to 10 to 8, etc.)
2. Their purpose was to encourage the disciples because of what they themselves had learned along the way (22): **"Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God"**
3. In order to prepare them for this, Paul and Barnabas did four things:
 - a. They strengthened the disciples (22a): In the Biblical context, to strengthen someone refers to providing them with what they need to stand firm in their faith:
 - 1) We often think of Paul as an evangelist, but another major aspect of his ministry was going back and strengthening the disciples (here, 15:41; 18:23)
 - 2) A major component of this is teaching; instruction in the Word
 - 3) This is why Paul and Barnabas stayed at Antioch and taught the new believers there for over a year (Acts 11:26)
 - 4) It's why Paul implored Timothy to **"preach the Word"** and wrote that because all Scripture is God-breathed, it is **"profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."** (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
 - 5) This must be something Paul instilled in all his students and helpers because we see Judas and Silas do the same in Acts 15:32: **"Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message."**
 - 6) This is why here at Renew we focus on expository preaching, teaching the Word of God book-by-book, and verse-by-verse
 - b. A second thing Paul and Barnabas did was encourage the disciples to continue in the faith (22b):
 - 1) The word for encourage here is actually the idea of exhorting or pleading with someone
 - 2) This often goes hand-in-hand with strengthening as we see here and in Acts 15 with Judas and Silas
 - 3) The Scriptures are filled with calls to stand firm in our faith:
 - 1 Corinthians 16:13: **"Be on alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong."**
 - Galatians 5:1: **"It is for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore, keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery."**

- Ephesians 6:13: **“Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.”**
 - Philippians 4:1: **“Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and my crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.”**
 - 2 Thessalonians 2:15: **“So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.”**
- 4) There was a reason why Paul spent so much time exhorting believers to stand firm:
- He understood that we enter the kingdom of God through many tribulations (REREAD v. 22)
 - But, he also knew that one day Jesus Christ is going to return and reward the faithful (Revelation 22:12-14): **“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. 13 “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” 14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city.”**
- c. A third thing Paul and Barnabas did was assign elders to protect the disciples (23a):
- 1) They knew that the disciples would immediately be under attack and that their faith would be challenged
 - 2) Listen to what Paul said to the elders at Ephesus (READ Acts 20:28)
 - a) The position of elder is one of responsibility for the well-being of believers, and it was established by God through the Holy Spirit
 - b) They are to act as shepherds, not overlords (e.g. like the Great Shepherd)
 - c) They are to be on guard and protect themselves and the flock from the savage wolves and false teachers that will seek to destroy God’s people
 - 3) This is why the Bible establishes strict guidelines as to who’s qualified to serve as elders within the local church, including that they be above reproach and men who are able to teach (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1)
- d. Finally, Paul and Barnabas commended (committed) the disciples to the Lord (23b)—this simply means that they entrusted them to the care and protection of the Lord
4. This tells us exactly what the purpose of the local church is; it is to be a place where believers are strengthened and encouraged in their faith so that they can stand firm, It’s where they can find refuge and protection from the attacks of the enemy and false teachers; it’s where they are entrusted to the Lord