

Not Easy, But Worth It!

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Date: 15 September 2024

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. So great to see you all this morning. Well, this morning we are continuing our series in the book of Acts.

And that means this morning we're coming to Acts chapter 14, and we're going to look at verses 8 to 20. We're picking up from where Tom left off last week, and Alicia is going to come now and read our passage for us this morning.

Thank you, Alicia. So we're reading in Acts 14, starting in verse 8. In Lystra there sat a man who was lame.

He had been that way from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him and saw that he had the 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 Laconian language, The gods have come down to us in human form.

[1 : 08] 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 crowds, shouting, Friends, why are you doing this?

We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them.

In the past, he let all nations go their own way, yet he has not left himself without testimony. He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons.

He provided 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 from Antioch and Iconium came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over.

[2 : 22] They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. But after the disciples had gathered round him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day, he and Barnabas left for Derb.

Thank you, Alicia. Thank you.

Christopher Se Crypto's **■ ■ k ■ ■ ■**. worth it when we can play music and others enjoy our music that we're playing. I am convinced that giving birth is not easy, but it's worth it when that baby arrives. So many things in life, these are just a few random things, but so many things in life are not easy, but worth it. I experienced that just a little bit myself when we were in Iowa in August because I decided, or others decided for me, that I was going to do some adult swimming lessons. I'm not a good swimmer, and let me tell you, I found it very, very difficult. I found it far from easy to remember what to do with my arms and my legs and my breathing all at the same time. I was sinking and I was splashing, and I was gulping down water. But let me tell you, the first time that I kind of floated my way down the pool, I was on top of the world. And it might have been a little bit crooked, it might not have looked very well, but it was all worth it because I was floating. So many things in life are not easy, but worth it. Well, as we look at our passage this morning, we will see that it was far from easy for Paul and Barnabas to bring the gospel to the people of Lystra. We will see that it was far from easy for them to be a witness to the people at Lystra, but was it worth it?

That's what we're going to consider this morning. We're going to look at these verses, and we will see how it was not easy for them to bring the gospel to the people of Lystra.

And then we're going to consider, was it all worth it? And we will consider if it is worth it for us. You know, it's not easy being a witness for Jesus. It's not easy living for him, seeking to be light for him. Is it all worth it?

[5 : 37] Well, usually up until now, when Paul and Barnabas entered a town, seeking to share about Jesus, the usual strategy, the usual strategy in general was to go to the Jewish synagogue in that town to try to point out to the Jewish people that Jesus is the long-awaited, promised, anticipated Messiah.

And we see this in last week's passage that Tom covered in chapter 14, verse 1. At Iconium, Paul and Barnabas went, as usual, into the Jewish synagogue.

There they spoke so effectively that a great number believed. You see, the Jewish people, they already knew about the God of the Old Testament.

So Paul, in general, would go into these synagogues, in these towns, seeking to kind of build on the knowledge of what they knew, to tell them that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

And many, many believed when Paul went into these synagogues, and he told them about the Messiah. Well, here is the thing about Paul and Barnabas bringing the gospel to the people of Lystra.

[6 : 52] There was no synagogue in the town of Lystra. So Paul and Barnabas, they cannot do their normal strategy, their usual strategy in Lystra.

Scholars point out that Lystra was a completely Greek pagan community. So these people in Lystra, they had no Jewish Old Testament background at all for Paul and Barnabas to build on, to tell them about the Messiah.

So here, Paul and Barnabas, in this completely Greek pagan community, would instead have to start from the very beginning to try to convince them that there even was a God of the Old Testament.

Well, interestingly, because there was no synagogue, where did Paul and Barnabas go? Well, in verses 8 and 9, it seems like they went to a public location in the town of Lystra, maybe the town center, to preach to the people there.

Well, one of the people who was there listening to Paul's preaching was this crippled man who had been crippled from birth.

[8 : 13] Well, as Paul was preaching in verse 10, we see that Paul saw that this crippled man had faith. So Paul called out to him and told him to stand up on his feet.

And incredibly, we read the man jumped up and he began to walk. You know, it's an incredible act of God's power.

There is nothing that our God cannot do. Well, I think it's fair to say that with this incredible act of God's power, Paul and Barnabas might not have had a synagogue to go into.

But at this time, with this miracle, Paul and Barnabas certainly had the people's attention. I think we see this often in the book of Acts.

We see God uses miracles. He uses healings to get people's attention in order for them to listen to and to hear and to receive the gospel.

[9 : 24] So at this point, I would say Paul and Barnabas had the people's attention. Paul is preaching the gospel. There has been this healing.

Everything seems to be going very well for Paul and Barnabas at this time. Well, this is where the difficulties would really start.

Because after this miracle, it becomes immediately clear that the people of Lystra totally misunderstood what was going on here.

Because after seeing this healing, instead of thinking that it was done by the one true living God, they instead thought that it was done by their own Greek gods.

They totally misunderstood Paul and Barnabas, and they totally misunderstood what was happening here. And in their misunderstanding, they actually misidentified Paul and Barnabas as their own Greek gods who had come down to them in human form to perform this miracle.

[10 : 40] We see in verse 13 that the people of Lystra believed that Barnabas was actually Zeus in human flesh. And we read that they thought that Paul was Hermes in human flesh.

And we're told that they thought that Paul was Hermes because apparently Hermes did more of the speaking. So they thought that that must be Paul. Paul. Paul. So due to this miracle, they thought that Paul and Barnabas were their own Greek gods who had come down to them in human flesh.

I think just a little bit of background helps us to understand maybe why the people taught this. And it's interesting, if you look at this passage, just about every scholar that looks at it points this out. The crowd's declaration here, that Paul was Hermes and Barnabas was Zeus, was more than likely informed by a local legend that Zeus and Hermes once visited this very region, once visited their ancestors, disguised in human form.

And the legend goes that in seeking lodging, Zeus and Hermes visited 1,000 homes and were turned away by each home until they finally came to a humble cottage where they were welcomed in by this elderly couple.

[12:12] Well, the myth goes that Zeus and Hermes in human form rewarded this couple by turning their little cottage into a temple with a golden roof, but they destroyed the homes of all of those who did not show hospitality.

Now, this, of course, is a myth. It's a legend. But the people in Lystra are recorded to have believed it to be true. So, very likely informed by this myth, when the people of Lystra saw this act of power, they thought that it was Paul and Barnabas, or they thought that Paul and Barnabas was Zeus and Hermes returning to them again in human form.

And thinking that this was Zeus and Hermes coming again, they immediately seek to honor them and to welcome them in any way possible. I suppose in their minds, they were not wanting to be destroyed like their ancestors.

And in their minds, maybe they thought that they all might get a house turned into a temple with a golden roof. So, they went all out honoring and welcoming Paul and Barnabas, thinking that they were Zeus and Hermes.

Verse 13, they brought bulls and reeds to the city because they wanted to offer them as a worship sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas. Well, in verse 14, when Paul and Barnabas realize what is happening, they, of course, they were deeply distressed, they were deeply appalled, and they were horrified that they were being misunderstood and misidentified, and they were horrified that they were being worshipped as false gods or even being worshipped at all.

[14:11] So, in response, Paul and Barnabas, they tear their garments as a sign of blasphemy, and they rush into the crowd, seeking to at once put a stop to this false worship and this madness.

And it's interesting, first in verse 15, Paul tells them that he and Barnabas are just humans. You know, you can imagine him saying, lads, you've got, you know, the wrong end of the stick. We're just humans, you know, we're just humans like you are. And then Paul tells them about the one true God.

And because these people have no Jewish Old Testament background at all, where does Paul start?

He starts by telling them that the one true God is the creator of all things. He's the creator of heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.

[15:23] And then Paul builds on that by telling them about the goodness and the kindness of the creator of all things. And I think in verses 15 to 17, Paul spoke so well, he spoke so clearly, he told them to turn from worthless things, turn to the one true living God.

Yet we read in verse 18 that even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

So when we think of Paul and Barnabas bringing the gospel to the people of Lystra, we can see that it was far from easy.

Despite what Paul said to them, the people were still intent in worshipping himself in worshipping himself and Barnabas as these false gods, Zeus and Hermes.

Well, as if that was not all difficult enough, now things take another twist. Paul and Barnabas in seeking to bring the gospel to the people of Lystra, they have been misunderstood, they have been misidentified, and now we'll see at the end of our passage that they will be, well, especially Paul, they will be badly mistreated.

[17:00] Verse 19, basically some Jews traveled from Antioch and Iconium to Lystra in order to try to convince the people to turn on Paul.

and this is really how dedicated these Jews were to putting a stop to Paul and the spread of the gospel in that they were willing to travel over a hundred miles to try to convince these people to turn on Paul and Barnabas.

And it worked. They managed to convince the crowd to stone Paul. And if we just think about that just for a moment, you know, what a turnaround this is.

These people have gone from worshiping Paul and Barnabas to no end. Nothing could stop their worship of Paul and Barnabas as Zeus and Hermes.

And now they want to stone Paul. I mean, how fickle mankind can be. What a turnaround. From worship, even though it was false worship, to now wanting to stone Paul.

[18:19] And stone him is what they did. Verse 19, they stoned Paul. And I'm sure that we can all gather that stoning someone was absolutely brutal.

It was absolutely brutal. Paul was brutally stoned and then his body was dragged out of the city. And everyone for good reason thought that Paul was dead. But this is truly amazing. We read in verse 20 that after the disciples had gathered around Paul's body, he got up.

You know, it's hard to keep Paul down. Maybe Barnabas and a few others had gathered around Paul. I wonder, was the man who had been healed, was he there as well?

A few disciples had gathered around Paul's body and you can kind of imagine them almost kind of looking down at him. Maybe mourning what had happened and also probably wondering what are we going to do next?

[19:36] And as they gathered around Paul, next thing, he gets up. Well, from what I could find, this was not normal.

Usually stoning meant one thing. Usually stoning meant death. And if we remember, Stephen was stoned to death. But I'm sure with the Lord's help, Paul, bloodied and bruised, got up and he went back into the city and then himself and Barnabas headed for their next town, Derby.

They kept going. I think when we look at these verses, I think that there's one thing for sure. For Paul and Barnabas bringing the gospel to the people of Lystra, it was far from easy.

Paul and Barnabas going to Lystra, they were misunderstood, they were misidentified, misidentified, and in the end they were badly, especially Paul, mistreated.

It almost cost Paul his life. But was it worth it? Was it all worth it? Well, if Paul and Barnabas were here this morning and if we brought them in and if we put them up on the stage, I'm sure that they would tell us in no uncertain terms that it was absolutely worth it.

[21:18] Because even though it was very, very difficult, even though it was far from easy, there would be in God's timing much, much eternal kingdom fruit from their trip to Lystra.

Because we see in just a few chapters time, in Acts chapter 16, that from Lystra, from this very place, would come or would sprout up a young disciple named Timothy, who of course would be Paul's sidekick and young apprentice going forward.

Acts chapter 16, verse 1, Paul returned to Derby and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived.

The fruit of Paul and Barnabas' witness in Lystra was in God's timing, people coming to faith, including Timothy.

And what could be more worth it than that? It was far from easy, but in God's timing, he brought fruit from their difficult witness.

[22:47] From the seeds that Paul and Barnabas sowed in the town of Lystra, maybe they thought they didn't sow much seeds, but from those seeds in this completely Greek pagan community, the Lord in his timing would bring forth Timothy and many others who would believe.

Well, folks, I think what is true for Paul and Barnabas in their visit to Lystra, I think is also true for us today, in that being a witness for Jesus today, is not always easy.

As we seek to be a witness for Jesus, as we seek to share the gospel, the love of Jesus with our words and with our actions, as a church and as individuals, in the towns and places that we are in, it won't always be easy.

And we too, as a church and as individuals, will at times be misunderstood, we will be misidentified, and even maybe mistreated at times.

And I think that that is and that will be difficult. And maybe at times we can maybe feel like giving up almost.

[24:12] You know, we can feel very discouraged. It can feel so hard to be a witness. I know I feel like that at times, that at times it can feel like we can be misunderstood, we can be misidentified, and at times even a little bit mistreated.

but I want to encourage us all this morning, that just like it was for Paul and Barnabas in Lystra, it will be absolutely worth it.

It is absolutely worth it to be a witness for Jesus, to share the love of Jesus with those around us, because just like Paul and Barnabas, God will use our witness to draw many, many people to himself.

If we remember Acts 1-8, we're all called to be his witnesses. Well, I think we're called to be his witnesses for a reason and for a purpose. He's called us to be his witnesses because he wants to use our witness to draw people to himself.

So being a witness for Jesus, even though it's not always easy, is so worth it, because the Lord, through the Holy Spirit, will use our witness to draw many more Timothy's and others to himself.

[25 : 46] So I just want to encourage us, let us not be discouraged, let us not give up in seeking to be light in the community that we are in. Rather, let us be encouraged, let us be greatly encouraged, that the same God who strengthened Paul and Timothy and Lystra, and who brought fruit from their witness, will strengthen us today, and he will bring fruit from our witness.

It's not always easy, but it is worth it, so let us keep pressing on together, being light in the community that we're in, and if we're ever feeling discouraged, let us think of Lystra, let us think of how difficult it was for them in Lystra, but then let us think of Timothy and how the Lord brought fruit from their difficult witness, and he'll bring fruit from our witness also.

So let's keep pressing on together. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word, and we thank you that in your word we're just given these different examples of people going to different communities seeking to bring the gospel to people, and we just thank you for Paul and Barnabas, and we thank you for how they went to Lystra, and we thank you for what we see there.

We see that it was far from easy, it was very, very difficult, that folks got the wrong end of the stick, and in the end of it, the people there actually turned on them. But Lord, we thank you that you were moving and you were working, and you brought fruit from that difficult witness.

And Lord, we thank you that you will bring fruit from our lives, even though at times it might feel very difficult, at times we might feel like almost giving up, but we thank you that you will bring fruit from our lives.

[27 : 41] We thank you that you're always with us, and the same spirit who empowered and strengthened Paul and Barnabas is living in us, and we thank you that we can take great encouragement from that.

I pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.