

Part 37 Pandemonium in Lystra

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney Wednesday, June 01, 2016

† Acts 14:1-20

We left off last Wednesday with Paul and Barnabas being thrown out of Antioch of Pisidia because the unbelieving Jews had stirred up the people against them. And the very last thing we read was **Act 13:51-52: But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.** And that is where we pick the story back up tonight:

1 And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.

It is interesting to note that there isn't much said about what Paul and Barnabas preached in this synagogue. I'm sure it was much the same message as they preached in Antioch of Pisidia. Here we find that a great multitude of Jews and Greeks believed. That means that they trusted Jesus as Savior after being convinced and convicted of their sins and turned from them to with saving faith to Jesus.

These "Greeks" that are mentioned are heathens, they are Gentiles. They were not looking for a coming Messiah as the Jews were but because of the power of the Gospel being preached they too become saved.

2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.

And of course, anytime the Gospel is being preached and people are getting saved, the devil tries to throw a wrench into things. Just as had happened in the last city they were in, there are unbelieving Jews stirring up trouble. These unbelieving Jews have done so much damage that the Bible says that they actually **"made their minds evil affected against the brethren."**

These Jews weren't satisfied with just not believing in Jesus or accepting the Gospel, they want to turn everyone else against it and cause them to think evil of the Gospel. That is how unbelievers are today as well. The Atheists aren't happy with just them being unbelievers, they want to try and make everyone else an unbeliever as well and to turn everyone's mind evil against Christianity.

That is why unbelievers throw such opposition to all things Christian here in the United States of America. The ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) and the FFRF (Freedom From Religion Foundation), along with various other hellish groups are all fighting against Christianity. They want every mention or symbol of Jesus removed from all public and private places and they want to "educate" and indoctrinate your children and grandchildren to have their minds evil affected against the Gospel of Jesus Christ. ...And that just goes to show you how powerful the Gospel really is!

3 Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

Paul and Barnabas are not going to allow their opposition to get the better of them. They continue preaching the Gospel and they even began speaking even more boldly of Christ.

4 But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.

And so, we have a city divided. Half of the people believe and half of the people do not believe. This is causing quite the stir in Iconium. My friend there are two things that are guaranteed to stir people up; 1. Politics, and 2. Religion. It's the age old argument. Both of these variables are affecting the people in Iconium. The Jews with their very religious strict laws and their powerful influence in governmental affairs. They use this influence to turn the Gentiles against Paul and Barnabas.

5 And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, 6 They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: 7 And there they preached the gospel.

Such an uproar is made that a mob has taken over. They set out to stone Paul and Barnabas to death, most likely charging them with blasphemy. Somehow Paul and Barnabas find out about the plan and they escaped. They end up in Lystra and there they once again begin preaching the Gospel. Lystra is about 30-miles south of Iconium.

8 And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: 9 The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, 10 Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.

This cripple man was most likely sitting near the Synagogue or wherever Paul was preaching so he could beg for alms. It says that he had been **cripple from his mother's womb**, so he has never walked in his life. We do not know his age but the Bible calls him a "man" and not a "young man," or "young boy," or a "lad," so he most likely is at least in his 30's or older. He would have been well known to everyone in Lystra. They would have seen him sitting by the entrance or exit of the city or where large numbers of people would pass by so that he could receive help from them.

This cripple man had been in listening distance of Paul's preaching and obviously had believed what he heard and had faith in Jesus because the Bible says: **"The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed."** This perception that Paul had that the man had enough faith to be healed would have been given to him by the Holy Ghost. Paul always walking in step with the Holy Spirit everywhere he went.

Paul looks at the man and very loudly told him to stand up on his feet. Can you imagine what everyone was thinking? Some were probably laughing at Paul thinking that he was crazy or that he couldn't possibly know this man was cripple or else he wouldn't tell him to stand up. Well, this man did more than just stand up. The Bible says that he **"leaped and walked."** Wow! What a miracle!

11 And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.

12 And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.

Now we get an idea just exactly what kind of environment Paul and Barnabas are in. It is a pagan, false-god worshipping society. Lystra was made up mostly of Greeks. They worshiped Roman and Greek gods and goddesses. They believed that these gods would come down from the heavens in the form of a human in order to work among them.

They believed Barnabas to be Jupiter, which is the Greek God Zeus. He was considered the King of the gods.

They believed Paul to be the Mercury, or *Mercurius* as in our Bible, which is the Greek God Hermes. He was considered to be the Messenger of the gods.

13 Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people.

As you entered into Lystra you would have immediately noticed a large temple built for the worship of Jupiter. They built these temples at the entrance so that everyone knew that the city was under the protection of their god. And just like the Jewish Temple, the Temple of Jupiter had its own priest. As soon as the Priest of Jupiter finds out what is happening he immediately gets busy doing his priestly job of bringing sacrifices before their god.

It says that he brought oxen and garlands. Most likely he brought two oxen, one to be sacrificed to Barnabas and the other to Paul, or as in their eyes; Jupiter and Mercury. The garlands were worn around the necks of the oxen. They would decorate the sacrificial animals with garlands of ribbons and flowers.

14 Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out,

“the apostles, Barnabas and Paul” Some have questioned why the Bible says the apostles, Barnabas and Paul? Was Barnabas also an Apostle? Well, let me answer that question. There are two senses in the way you use the term apostle. We are familiar with the most common way which is one that is personally chosen by Christ to be one of His witnesses. That would be the 12 disciples and Paul who was chosen by Him after his resurrection. But the term apostle can be used in another sense meaning; “**a messenger or ambassador who is sent.**”

While Barnabas was not one of the Apostles chosen personally by Christ, he most certainly was sent out as an ambassador by the Church of Antioch upon the leadership of the Holy Spirit. This is why he is referred to as an Apostle as well since he is working in the apostolic office of being a messenger of the Gospel.

“They rent their clothes.” This is the Jewish sign of distress, mourning, and horror. Renting your clothes means that you tear them. Some garments would have special cloth sewn into them for the occasion of renting, or they would tear certain parts like tear a sleeve off. They did not tear their entire clothing off but would rip it as an outward sign of distress. Here Paul and Barnabas showing their great distress in the people treating them like deities.

15 And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: 16 Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. 17 Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

They tell the people to stop treating them like gods that they are only men the same as they were. They were simply there preaching the Gospel. He urges them to turn from their false idol worship and turn to the real God, the living God, the God which made heaven and earth and sea and everything in it. He is the God they need to be bowing down to.

18 And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.

Even Paul's pleading barely stopped them from offering up sacrifices to them. They were so convinced that they were the gods Jupiter and Mercury that they could scarcely restrain themselves.

19 And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.

It wasn't enough for the unbelieving Jews from Antioch and Iconium to expel Paul and Barnabas out of their countries, but they took it upon themselves to follow them to Lystra to stir up trouble. That means the one's from Antioch of Pisidia have traveled over 100 miles to make trouble and the one's from Iconium 30-miles. These are some determined folks. But the devil's crowd always is.

“who persuaded the people” Notice how easy it was for these Jews to change the minds of these false god worshipers. They went from wanting to worship and offer up a sacrifice to them to stoning them. So as you can see people that do not worship the true God are apt to be misled because they do not have real faith in their gods.

And they stoned Paul, “and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.” This mob in their angry rage grab Paul and begin pounding him with rocks. They believed that they had beat him to death and drug his body outside of the city and dumped him like worthless garbage.

Many believe that it was during this time that Paul had his vision of going up into the 3rd Heaven. He said in **2 Corinthians 12:2: I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.** It very well could have been this time period he was referring to, we just don't know but it is something to think about.

20 Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

And so we end this study tonight right here with Paul actually going BACK into the city that he was just thrown out of and left for dead.

† All Scripture from the Authorized King James Version