

**Commentary on Acts chapter 14 by Chuck Smith 4.16.23**

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**April memory verse Romans 10:17 (NKJV)**

So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

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Paul and Barnabas, in carrying the Gospel, have come into the uncharted territories as far as the Gospel is concerned into Asia Minor. They came from Cyprus to the area that is now known as Turkey. They did not remain in the coastal plains of Pamphylia. It is thought that Paul probably got malaria fever. It was a very prevalent thing around the coastal plains of Pamphylia at that time.

And later on when Paul wrote to the Galatians and he spoke to them of how sick he was when he was there with them. So the fact that Paul did not stay in Pamphylia, but immediately moved into the upper plateau country of Pisidia to the city of Antioch, that he was going up there for actually health reasons as much as anything else. Coming into the area of Galatia.

There in Antioch they went into the synagogue. They preached Jesus Christ, and there was a tremendous response the following week. Practically the whole town came out to listen to them, which created a jealousy in the hearts of the Jews in the synagogues, and they turned the people against Paul and Barnabas. So Paul and Barnabas left Antioch, and as we come into chapter 14, they went from Antioch about fifty miles away to Iconium.

And so when they came into Iconium, [as was their procedure] they went into the synagogue again on the sabbath day, and they again spoke, and a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against Paul and Barnabas and those who had believed. And so they remained there a long time speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and the Lord granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands ([Act 14:1-3](#)).

So they were facing opposition in Iconium. And rather than fleeing from the opposition, they stayed there a long time in order that they might really root and ground those who believed in the faith. I think that one of the weaknesses of modern day evangelism is the lack of follow up. It is rather tragic to bring people to a birth in Jesus Christ, but don't carry them on into a mature state. And that has been one of the great weaknesses of the church today.

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So many times the church makes its emphasis upon evangelism rather than the developing of a strong body. And so when they saw the opposition, they remained there in Iconium for a long a time in order that they might really establish the believers in the faith knowing that they were going to have difficulty in their Christian walk.

Now, "they spoke boldly in the Lord, who gave testimony unto the word of His grace." In other words, in the gospel of Acts, the last verses is that they went everywhere preaching the Gospel. The Lord working with them with signs following. Here again the Lord gave witness to the truth that they declared by signs, miracles, wonders that were done there in Iconium to confirm the truth of what was being declared. Signs following.

Today many have reversed that, and they have signs preceding. And they hope by the signs to attract people. But here and in the New Testament, the signs were for confirming the truth of the Word that had been declared. And so they had declared boldly the Lord to them who gave them confirming evidence to the people of the truth.

But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. 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, and they became aware of it, and fled to Lystra [about forty miles away] and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: and there they preached the gospel. And there sat a certain man at Lystra, who was lame in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never been able to walk: the same heard Paul speak: and as Paul was steadfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, so he said to him with a loud voice, Stand up on your feet. And he leaped and walked. 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. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter [or Zeus]; and they called Paul, Mercurius [or Hermes] ([Act 14:4-12](#)),

Now they were Greeks; Jupiter and Mercurius were the Roman names of the Greek gods of Zeus and Hermes. Zeus was supposedly born to Crores and Rhea who were of the mythological race of the Titans. When Zeus grew up, he and his brothers rebelled against the Titans and overthrew them. And Zeus became the chief god, the god of the skies. Hermes was born of an illicit relationship, one of the many that Zeus had of the goddesses and the mortal women, and was known as the god of speech. And because Paul was the chief spokesman, they figured he must be Hermes and because Barnabas was probably a very stately looking person, taller, they said that he was Zeus.

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Now there at Lystra there was a great temple to Jupiter. And according to the legend, years earlier, Jupiter and Hermes came to the city of Lystra incognito. But nobody recognized them and the people treated them rather shabbily. But there was one couple who took them in and treated them nice. And so for a reward, Zeus made them the perpetual keepers of the temple of Zeus there in Lystra. For he turned them into two trees that stood at the front of the temple. And thus, they were the perpetual guards of the temple of Zeus.

And so when they saw this miracle that Paul had wrought, speaking the word of faith to this lame man. For somehow again by the Spirit of God, Paul knew that this man had faith to be healed. And it had to be just the discerning of the Spirit of God on Paul's part. So Paul said with a loud voice, the word of faith, "Stand up on your feet!"

Now at this point, the man had one of two choices: either to stand up on his feet, believing the word of faith, or to laugh and scoff at the command of Paul and beg his inability. Notice how many times Jesus gave impossible commands. With the man with the withered hand he said, "Stretch forth your hand." "Lord, I can't, my hand is withered. Can't you see?"

Now those who have been challenged with the word of faith have a choice to obey and to receive that work of God or to argue with Him. Unfortunately, I'm afraid that too many times we're arguing with the Lord. The Lord speaks His word of faith to our hearts, "Be strong! Go in and conquer!" "Oh, Lord, I would love to conquer. Oh, Lord, I'm so weak. I would just love...oh, You don't know, Lord, how I'd love to do that." And we're telling Him all the reasons why we can't rather than just obey and going ahead and doing it.

Now if you will just will to obey those commands of Christ to your hearts, you will find, as did this man, that God will give to you all that you need to obey His command of faith. So when God says to you, "Alright now, be strong and be victorious," you say, "Alright, Lord!" And just accept and be strong and victorious. That's all there is to it. If you will to obey, He will give you the capacity to do it.

So Paul spoke a word of faith. The man stood on his feet and began to leap and walk, and the people said, "The gods have come down! He's come back again!" You know, the legend was that he had been there before. "He's come back again!" So they ran down to the temple of Jupiter.

The temple was there at the gates of the city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and the priests of Zeus would have done sacrifice with the people. Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard it, they tore their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, and saying, Sirs, why do ye these

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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: who in times past allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he did not leave himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness ([Act 14:13-17](#)).

Now notice, here are people, and notice there was no synagogue in Lystra. Paul's usual method in coming into the city would be to go into the synagogue. Because there at least the people had a basic foundation in their knowledge of God, having studied the Old Testament. They knew the true and the living God. Now Paul is getting further and further into the wilds, you might say. He comes now to the city of Lystra where no synagogue existed. Now in any city if there were ten adult Jewish males, they would form a synagogue. So that means there wasn't ten adult Jewish males in Lystra. No synagogue.

So Paul just goes on the street and starts to preach to the people. But in talking to them about God, he must start with nature. "God has not left Himself without witness in that God has been good. He's given you the rainy seasons. He's given you the fruitful ground." Lystra was the center of the corn raising of the ancient world. It was the Iowa of that time where most of the corn was raised. Very good abundant crops. "God has given to you the fruitful seasons. God has given you the rain. God has made Himself known through nature. So God has not been witness." And so he starts where they are. They have very little concept of the true and the living God. All they know about God is the legends of Zeus, who through his many affairs gave birth to Apollo, to Athena, to Museas, to Phades, to Artimus, and to all of the other gods that they worship. But they didn't know about the true and the living God.

And so Paul starts at an area that they can understand--the revelation of God in nature. And so, as they are ready to make a sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas, Paul says, "No, we've come to preach to you. We're men, we're just like you are, and we've come to preach to you that you should turn from these vanities, these legends, these beliefs that you have are empty. They're not true! You should turn from these to the living God who made the heaven and the earth, the seas, everything that is in them and has left His witness by being good to you and giving you rain and fruitful seasons." So he starts where they are. God has revealed Himself in nature.

David tells us in the nineteenth Psalm that the heavens declare the glory of God. The earth shows His handiwork. Day unto day they utter their speech. Night unto night their voice goes forth and there is not a speech nor a language where their voice is not heard. God speaks to man universally in nature. Every night the

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heavens talk to you. When you look up into that star filled sky, God is talking to you. The heavens are declaring to you the glory, the vastness, the awesomeness of God. Every day as you look around at the flowers, the fields, the various life forms, God is speaking to you.

The problem is that so often we are misinterpreting and we stop short, and man begins to worship and serve the creature more than the Creator. Paul speaks of that danger in Romans. So a man becomes a pantheist. Yes, he's aware of God, but everything becomes god. That beautiful green bean field becomes god, though it's going to turn brown and die and get plowed under. But he begins to worship nature.

I believe that at this point Paul was facing one of the gravest dangers in his whole career. At this point his career could have come to an end. His ministry and work for God could have halted right here had he taken praise and the glory that these people were wanting to put upon him.

I think the greatest danger of the ministry is not when you're under severe persecution, but when God has used your life, you're highly effective and everybody begins to speak well of you, begins to praise you, begins to declare what a marvelous person and all you are. You are facing there the gravest danger of your ministry, because if you accept that praise, you will soon find yourself sitting on the shelf.

It is interesting how that again man wants to worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator. Paul was the instrument that God used and so they were ready to worship Paul. Now Paul could have rationalized in his mind, "Well, this is good. I've got them right in my hands. I'll let them go ahead and worship me and then I'll point them to the Lord." And unfortunately, there are many people who follow this policy. They try to draw persons to themselves, and, once they're really attached to me, I can turn them over to the Lord. "They so admire me and they so love me, now I'll bring them to Jesus." It's a very dangerous rationale.

Paul, rather than receiving the praise, said, "No, this is emptiness. I'm only a man! Don't worship the creature; worship the Creator. We've come to preach to you that you should turn from this emptiness, from these vanities to the living God. Don't stop short by worshipping the creature. Worship the Creator who is blessed forevermore." And even so, they were almost insisting on going ahead to worship Paul and Barnabas. They were scarcely able to stop the people who were intent upon worshipping them.

Now if you think that the worship of man, glory and praise of man is a very desirable and wonderful thing to have, let me just give you a word of warning.

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The glory and the praise of man is very fickle. As will testify any ball player who has gone into a slump for a period of time. You can be a great hero, but just go into a slump for a while and every time you come up to bat you will hear the "boo's" of the people. And how many athletes, every time they step up to the plate they've heard the crowd shouting their name, chanting their name, stomping their feet. Standing up and cheering and cheering, "Our hero has come to bat!" But let's just let him go into a deep slump over a period of time. How the adulation of the world does change. Every time you come up to bat you hear the "boo's" and the "hisses." How fickle is the worship of man. Evident there at Lystra. Here they're ready to worship them as a god. Verse 19:

And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, they drug him out of the city, supposing he had been dead ([Act 14:19](#)).

These same people that were ready to worship him have now lynched him because stoning was a form of lynching in those days. It was no justice, just that crowd mob psychology. And these people ready to worship him now stone him and drug him out of the city when they thought they had killed him.

Now, I personally feel they did kill him. Now that's sort of brash perhaps to say, because Paul himself said he didn't know whether or not they killed him. But since he didn't know, I have a right to my feeling! Years later when Paul was writing his second letter to the Corinthian church, no doubt referring to this experience here in Lystra, he said, "There was a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, or whether out of the body, I really don't know;) but such a one was caught up into the third heaven. And there heard things so marvelous, that it would be a crime to try to describe it with human language. Of such a one I will boast" ([II Corinthians 12:2-5](#)).

Paul wrote about this Lystra experience, and he declared, "Whether I was in the body or out of the body, I don't know. Whether I was still alive and had the vision, or I was actually dead and had an out of the body experience, I can't tell you for sure. But what I can tell you for sure is that I was caught up into the third heaven and there it was so glorious! The things I heard were so fantastic that there is no language that can describe them. And if I try to describe them it would be a crime, because there are no words that are adequate to describe what I had heard. And because of the abundance of the revelations that were given to me, there was also given to me this thorn in the flesh, a minister of Satan to buffet me." It could be that Paul received injuries at that stoning from which he never recovered. Paul said, "Of such a one I will boast."

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So the fickleness of the glory of the crowd. Ready to worship him, ready to kill him. So they drug him out of the city thinking he was dead.

However, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city ([Act 14:20](#)):

Now, you think he would run. Not Paul. He came right back into the city.

and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra [right back to where he was stoned], and to Iconium [where they were planning to stoning him], and then on to Antioch [where he got kicked out of town shaking the dust off of his feet], as they confirmed the souls of the disciples, and exhorted them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God ([Act 14:20-22](#)).

They didn't say, "Well, fellas, it's a rosy path. Now that you've accepted Jesus, all of your problems are over! Isn't that nice! Jesus is so good! You're not going to have another problem." No, they said, "Hey, hang in there, man. It's going to be tough. With much tribulation you're going to enter into the kingdom." But they encouraged them to the faithfulness in Christ.

Later, Paul wrote to Timothy who came from this area. Timothy grew up in this area and, no doubt, met Paul on this first journey, joined Paul later as a companion and as a servant. But Timothy, Paul called him "my son in the faith." So it was, no doubt, in this journey that Paul met Timothy and he was converted. Paul later wrote Timothy and reminded him of the tribulation that he faced while in that territory and he said how that God delivered me while I was in Iconium and in Lystra and in Derbe, how God delivered me.

Now herein is interesting to me, the different ways by which God delivered Paul from these enemies. In Antioch God delivered Paul by having him kicked out of town. He said, "Well, God freed me from those people." In Iconium they were plotting to stone him, but Paul learned of the plot and left town before they had a chance. So God delivered him by making him aware of the plot against his life. But in Lystra, God delivered him by having them think that he was dead and then dragging him out of the city.

Now God doesn't follow a particular pattern, He's very versatile. He refuses to be confined to a pattern. It is interesting how that man is constantly seeking to put God into a form. I want to somehow put God into a rut because I'm always in a rut. And I want to pattern God so I can say this is how God works. This is how God will deliver you. There are those people who are offering simplistic answers

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for complex problems, but let me tell you something: there are no simple answers; there are no pattern ways by which God works. God may deliver you by letting you know the trouble is afoot. God may be delivering you by the foot, kicking you out of town. Or God may deliver you through the stoning from the angry mob. God works in different ways, His works in our lives. And He does not confine Himself to one single way or pattern of working, but He works through diversity.

So they encouraged them to hang in there, "It's going to be tough, but through much tribulation, we will enter into the kingdom of God." And so in these churches, they ordained elders.

and they prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed ([Act 14:23](#)).

Brothers, we just place you into the hands of the Lord. And after the prayer and fasting, anointed and prayed for the elders, appointed these elders over the church.

And after they had passed throughout Pisidia [the upper area where Antioch was], they came back again to the coastal plains of Pamphylia. And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia: where they caught a ship and sailed back to Antioch [where they had begun their journey back in the beginning of chapter 13], they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they had fulfilled ([Act 14:24-26](#)).

So they fulfilled their first missionary journey, and they came back again to the brethren there in Antioch on the northern coast of the Mediterranean from the area of Phoenicia.

And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they abode for long time with the disciples ([Act 14:27-28](#)).

So they came back to their home church, sharing with them the glorious work of God among the Gentiles, miracles of grace and the number of believers in the body of Christ being expanded into the Gentile world.