

Part 38 Confirming and Exhorting the Churches

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney Wednesday, June 08, 2016

† Acts 14:21-28

We left off last Wednesday with an angry mob stoning Paul then drug him outside the city and left for dead, and we read in **Acts 14:20**: 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 that is where we pick the story back up tonight:

21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch,

So the next place they take the Gospel message is to Derbe. Derbe is 30-miles south east of Lystra and it is the last new place that they visit on this first missionary journey. It says that the “taught many,” I take that to mean that many people had believed the Gospel and became Christians. Not much else is mentioned of Derbe or what all went on there but it appears to be a success and no mention of opposition. We will talk more about Derbe when we get in the second missionary journey and Paul returns there.

Then it says; **they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch.** Talk about not letting anything keep them from preaching the Gospel! They return right back to the places where they were treated so badly. I want you to keep in mind these Churches are churches of Galatia. Galatia was a Roman province in the area that we call southeast Turkey. So when Paul writes the Epistle to the Galatians he is writing to these Churches; Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.

One interesting side note concerning Galatia, over in Paul’s epistle to the churches in Galatia he writes this: **Galatians 4:12-14 Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are: ye have not injured me at all. 13 Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. 14 And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.**

Paul was suffering from some kind of sickness while he was there. He may have contracted some kind of disease such as Malaria or dysentery while he was on the Island of Cyprus which caused him to be sick much of the time he was in the province of Galatia. Both of those diseases have similar symptoms; fevers, nausea, diarrhea, pain, and fatigue, all which would have been very hard on Paul and could have drove some people away, but Paul said that the Galatians didn’t despise him or reject him despite his infirmity.

It is also quite possible that this sickness that he had in Galatia was the same sickness that he refers to as his “thorn in the flesh.” He speaks of it in **2 Corinthians 12:7-10**: And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. 8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. 9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

We cannot say positively it was the same thing but he does refer to both as infirmities.

They turn back first to **Lystra**, as we read last week where they tried to worship Paul and Barnabas, calling them Jupiter and Mercurius, and then they tried to stone Paul to death, drug him outside the city and left him for dead.

Then they travel back to **Iconium** where the whole city was divided and they sought to stone them to death but Paul and Barnabas found out about it and fled before they could.

Then they travel back to **Antioch of Pisidia** where those contradicting and blaspheming Jews stirred up all the people and they cast them out of their coasts.

Paul and Barnabas are not going to let the opposition or fear of the Jews from checking on the Churches that were started while they were there.

22 Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

They confirmed the souls – that word “confirming” means **to strengthen**. In other words they used their knowledge of the Scriptures and authority of the Holy Ghost and their influence as the preachers who brought them the Gospel, to help the new Christians and the new churches in their walk with God. They would of course teach them doctrine and the ways of the Lord and how to live a Christian life.

This is called discipleship. Sadly, most Baptist Churches are very poor at discipleship. We want to see them saved but most don’t want to follow up. That’s why you have a lot of new Christians that fall through the cracks and

get out of Church and back out into the world. They need help. They are like new born babes, they need the milk. They need a stronger Christian's help to see that they are continuing on in their Christian walk.

Exhorting them – that means to “**be of good comfort, to offer encouragement.**” That is one of the things that we are supposed to do when we come together as a Church body, exhort one another. That's why it says this in **Hebrews 10:25** **Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.**

Here it says that Paul and Barnabas exhorted **them to continue in the faith.** There again is the example of discipleship. They are encouraging them to continue in the faith. These new Christians are going to have to face a lot of trials because of their beliefs. That is why it says **and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.** Living for the Lord isn't just a bed of roses. You won't find a single person in the Bible that is mentioned of having great faith that it also doesn't mention all of the hard trials that they endured. New Christians need to know that they have Jesus to lean on in times of trials.

I have heard some people say things like; “**well, I tried Jesus and as soon as I did everything started going wrong.**” Listen friend, don't use that terminology around me, “**I tried Jesus,**” or “**give Jesus a try.**” You don't “**try**” Jesus. You try new ice cream flavors or new brands of coffee, if you don't like them you try something else or you give it up. You don't “try” Jesus, you trust him by faith. If your faith is real you aren't trying him you are following him.

23 And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

That word “**ordained**” here means to “**elect or appoint.**” The word “**elder**” means “**one who presides over the assembly, a bishop, or as we say, pastor.**” I was ordained right here in this Church 6-years ago, May 31, 2010. A year and 3 months later I was elected as Pastor. This coming August I will have been pastoring here for 5-years.

So, the Apostles are helping them get their Churches organized by putting in the right spiritual leaders. They fasted and prayed over these leaders and sought the Lord on making the right decisions. If the wrong man gets put in charge it could spell disaster for the Church.

24 And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. 25 And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia:

If you remember, Perga in Pamphylia was where John-Mark left them. **Acts 13:13** **Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.** I'm sure Paul thought of this while they were there.

26 And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. 27 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 they come back to their sending Church, Antioch in Syria. What a great reunion that must have been! Much like our missionaries when they come here and give us updates on what all is going on in their mission field, Paul and Barnabas do the same with their Church. The word “**rehearsed**” means they gave an account of their travels and what all had went on.

Everyone that works in the ministry should be able to give an account of their work. That is why I like to get the prayer letters from our missionaries so I know what they are doing. We need to always make sure we are being good stewards with what belongs to God. I've heard horror stories of missionaries that have left the ministry but still continue taking checks from their supporting churches. That is the same thing as stealing if you ask me. Our mission's coordinator, Sis. June, is good about keeping up with all of the missionaries that we support.

Not only should missionaries be able to give an account of their work in the ministry but so should preachers and pastors. You should be able to ask me anytime what I am doing in the ministry.

28 And there they abode long time with the disciples.

We don't know how long they abode there at Antioch, it is likely it was anywhere between 5 and 8 years. The next thing we read about them is the next chapter which we will be studying next Wednesday, and the Jerusalem council convenes over the matter of circumcision and whether or not the Levitical dietary laws should still be observed, especially by the Gentiles.

† All Scripture from the Authorized King James Version