



*October 27, 2024*

*“The Choices of God”*

*Sunday school at 9:30, Service at 10:30.*

*News:*

No Wednesday Evening Classes This Week – Resume on November 6<sup>th</sup>  
 Ladies Night Monday, November 4<sup>th</sup> ~ Elder/Deacon/Staff Meeting Thursday, November 7<sup>th</sup>  
 Fall Family Gathering & Potluck Next Sunday After the Service

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Whether it's positive or negative, the Name of Jesus elicits a powerful response.

Seeing such a profound miracle the locals responded by worshipping the Apostles as gods.

Galatia because the Gauls eventually made peace with the Seleucid Empire in the Konya Plain.

Greek Mythology is convoluted. Zeus, Roman Jupiter, was the patron deity of Lystra. Hermes, Roman Mercury, was the messenger of the Gods.

**Acts 14:14–18 ~**

Why did it take Paul and Barnabas a little time to figure out what was going on?  
 God demonstrates His power very sparingly.

*Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.*

*God Bless You!*

So that the spectacular doesn't become...  
 So that people don't see God as a...  
 So that it requires more human...

The pagan worshippers were not easily dissuaded – they were still unsure.

**Acts 14:19-22 ~**

The Jews from Antioch and Iconium arrived to help convince the pagans.

If the miracle was wrought by blasphemers, then they were...

Stoning was, and is, a violently brutal exercise with the sole purpose of producing a painful and terrifying death. Paul's experience (II Corinthians 11:22–12:6).

Why did God fix Paul and then protect him only after the fact?

To duplicate for Paul what he had perpetrated...  
 To help other Christians forgive Paul...  
 To give Paul and the others the faith to trust God...

These new Christians are called “disciples.” The Greek is μαθητής (mä-thā-tās) ...

Where He leads there is trial and tribulation. Only through struggle can you learn to fully trust Him (Luke 9:23–26).

It's only two little words ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους (ä-gä-pä-tě ä-l-lā-lüs), “Love one another.” It's plural meaning that...

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 Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon or Elder.

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 Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

So far, we've seen our band of Apostolic church-planters travel from Syrian Antioch to Cyprus and then up to the southern coast of Pamphylia into Galatia. They stopped in the city of Antioch on the ancient border between Phrygia and Pisidia. Then they made their way to Lydia, and we'll see today, on to Perga, both in the ancient area of Lycaonia.

What we've seen is that there are those, both Jew and Gentile who believe and those, both Jew and Gentile who oppose. ① Interestingly both groups are compelled to action based upon their response. Neither group is casual or complacent or nonchalant about their reaction to Jesus.

Jesus has that effect. You can publicly talk about God, about Heaven, about Angels, about all manner of religious ideas that are sanitized and generalized, and no one gets too worked up either way.

Mention Jesus, fully God manifested on earth as fully man. Talk about His Crucifixion to pay for human sin. His Resurrection proving that it worked. His Return in Judgment. The Truth that He is the Great "I AM" made flesh and as such He is the way, and the truth, and the life. That no one comes to the Heavenly Father except

through Him. Talk about that in public and a noticeable shift in the demeanor of your audience will take place. Some of them were actively positive, some of them were actively negative. People, whether back then, as now, tend to clearly take a side. “There’s just something about that name.”

In Lystra, God recreated a lame man’s legs and feet. He rewired his brain. He strengthened his shriveled muscles. He enabled him to leap up and instantly walk even though he had never walked before.

The locals responded by shouting in the local native language, “The gods have become like men and have come down to us!” They concluded that Barnabas was Zeus and that Paul was Hermes. Here we have the Parthenon in Athens. A Temple dedicated to their patron goddess Athena. In Lystra, the primary deity worshipped was Zeus.

I don’t want to get bogged down in a long historical study of the area geography and of the Greek religion, but I feel like I should give just a little context.

As I said before the reason the Romans named this whole area Galatia was because Gauls from the area

of modern-day France, Switzerland, and Austria expanded through ancient Thrace, basically into what is now the southern half of Bulgaria. In roughly 270 B.C. they fought a war against the Seleucid Empire and were able to carve out from them this area of the Konya Plain. (Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine).

Remember the Seleucids were Greeks who had taken the eastern territory conquered by Alexander the Great about 60 years earlier. Of course, before the Greeks and the Gauls there were the indigenous people called the Lycaonians. The languages and cultures mixed together and were later further mixed with Roman influences.

The reason Greek Mythology is so convoluted and even contradictory is that local people incorporated that mythology with their native religious figures and stories. The local mother-goddess would become Hera, or Athena, or Aphrodite. The most powerful male god would become Zeus, or Poseidon, or Apollo.

The same thing happened when Christianity was mixed with pagan beliefs. Hades, or Roman Pluto, became Satan and The Sumerian Queen of Heaven, Mother Goddess, Semiramis became the Canaanite Asherah,

who became the Anatolian Cybele who became the Greek Artemis, who became the Roman Diana, and finally who became the idolatrous version of the Christian Mary as she is worshipped by millions of people today.

For the people in Lystra at that time the Greek idea that the gods frequently took on human form and walked among the people was ingrained in the psyche. Seeing such a truly astonishing miracle, a man crippled from birth leaping up and walking, it was easy for the people to think that the Apostles were gods in human form, and they began to worship them accordingly.

Zeus, Roman Jupiter, was the most powerful god and since He was the patron god of Lystra it made sense that one of the guys was him. Paul was the orator – He did most of the talking and it was natural that they would take him to be Hermes, Roman Mercury, who was the messenger of the Gods. Hermes was the Greek Logos, the Greek Word of... the gods.

Acts 14:14–18, 14But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard about it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out 15and saying, “Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men, of the

same nature as you, preaching the gospel to you, to turn from these useless things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything that is in them. 16In past generations He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; 17yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” 18And even by saying these things, only with difficulty did they restrain the crowds from offering sacrifices to them.

It took Paul and Barnabas a little time to figure out what was going on. Remember the locals were doing all of this in the Lycaonian language. This is a very interesting reality check.

Our guys were speaking to the people primarily in Greek, with a little simple Hebrew directed at the Jews, and maybe a bit of Latin for the true Romans in the crowd, but there was no way that Paul and Barnabas were fluent in Lycaonian, or the other 21 different languages and dialects spoken in what is now central Turkey.

② You might think, “well, what about tongues and the interpretation of tongues? Couldn’t the Holy Spirit have given them the ability to speak and understand the local languages where they travelled?” Certainly! It wasn’t like God didn’t know what they were saying, but for His Divine reasons, God demonstrates His power through His agents very sparingly.

1 It's partly so that the spectacular doesn't become mundane, 2 it's partly so that people don't see God as a sugar daddy, 3 it's partly to keep belief a faith-based choice, rather than a fact-based choice. 4 It's partly because it requires more human interaction absent the miraculous quick fix – that means more relational contact. He has other reasons as well, but for our purposes, 5 His methodology strengthens us spiritually, so that we can be His touch in this world physically.

When God wants to communicate to a person when there's a language barrier, He generally gives the Christian agent the Holy Spirit encouragement to engage that person and find a way to make the mysteries of Christ knowable to them in some way. That's opposed to Him just empowering a universal translator where no effort is required. That process of figuring it out is relational – it takes commitment, effort,



and care, to do that, and that, in itself, is part of God's Message to them. He cares – they matter to Him, and that message is given without words through the willing Christian.

In the process of preaching the Gospel with such a language barrier, misunderstanding is inevitable, and it takes time and patience to move forward. Well, Paul was preaching in Greek and even though they all spoke Greek, they did so at varying levels of fluency – it was a second or third language for most of them. So, it is quite understandable if there had been some miscommunication.

Greek wasn't the language the locals used among themselves. They were more comfortable with their native language, and so, it took a bit for Paul and Barnabas to figure out what was going on and once they did, they were horrified.

Starting in verse 15, Luke gives us a summary of the kinds of things the Apostles were saying to the people to convince them that they were not Zeus and Hermes. It was a hard sell trying to convince them, but the guys wouldn't take no for an answer and unlike King Herod Agrippa back in chapter 12, they did whatever was

necessary to stop the blasphemous worship by the crowd.

The pagan, and so thoroughly superstitious, worshippers were not easily dissuaded. Their mythological gods often tried to go incognito when they took on human form – they often wanted to blend in and go unnoticed. The only way to truly convince the people that they were not the gods they thought they were, was to denounce all of their pagan gods as false gods.

They called them “useless things.” When you tell a mob of excited, enthusiastic, dedicated people that they are completely wrong, not just wrong in the moment, but foundationally wrong and so entirely wrong. That they’ve always been wrong, that their parents, grandparents and all of their ancestors before them were wrong, that they’ve been wrong in what they’ve been teaching their kids... Well, it doesn’t usually go over really well.

Verse 18 shows that most of the people were still trying to figure it out. Some probably thought Zeus and Hermes were testing them, others were angry but

couldn't deny the miracle. There was likely a general confusion among the crowd at this point.

Acts 14:19-22, 19But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, thinking that he was dead. 20But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he left with Barnabas for Derbe. 21And after they had preached the gospel to that city and had made a good number of disciples, they returned to Lystra, to Iconium, and to Antioch, 22strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "It is through many tribulations that we must enter the kingdom of God."

While the Gentiles were trying to understand what was happening, the Jews from Antioch and Iconium arrived to wreck the day. They were more than pleased to help convince the pagans that not only were Paul and Barnabas not the gods they thought they were, they actually were denouncing those gods as false.

That full realization violently shoved the crowd all the way from believing that the Apostles were divine into believing that they were evil. The tremendous miracle

that they had seen wrought through the Apostles was the work of some kind of trick or black magic to lure the people away from their true gods.

The Apostles were blasphemers to the Gentiles for denouncing the gods that they worshipped and were blasphemers to the Jews for preaching Salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus, instead of through the meticulous keeping of the Law.

The mob was so incensed that they stoned Paul on the spot. Stoning was and still is a very common method of execution, especially by enraged mobs. Usually, they had the restraint to drag the person outside of the city walls before murdering them, but here they did the dragging after they killed Paul.

The disciples in verse 20 include Barnabas and others travelling with him and Paul, as well as believers from Lystra. Well, they were standing over Paul's lifeless body where the people who stoned him unceremoniously dumped him.

I don't want to get morbid here, but stoning wasn't chucking a few small rocks at a person. It was and is a violently brutal endeavor with the sole purpose of

producing a painful and terrifying death. No one stones a person as a form of corporal punishment, it only ever used as a form of capital punishment. It is always intended to kill and so you don't stop until you've achieved the desired effect.

The people who stoned Paul knew what they were doing, they knew what the end goal was, and they knew intimately what a dead body looked like. It's a fascinating sidenote that we modern people are so isolated from death. Many Americans have never seen a dead body, but that definitely wasn't the case for the people in the first century. They knew exactly what a dead body looked like and after they were convinced that they had succeeded in their mission to murder Paul. They then dragged him out of the city and dumped him in the sewage heap.

③I believe that they did succeed. This is purely my opinion. In my opinion, I believe that Paul was killed by stoning and revived by Jesus just as Lazarus had been revived by Jesus and just like Eutychus in chapter 20 will be revived through the Apostle Paul.

Paul talks about this event in his second letter to the Corinthians where he gives the reason why the

Corinthians should follow his example. He starts off by detailing his pedigree and education and moves on to his commitment to the ministry and then to the things that he had thus far endured as an Apostle. He says that he has suffered through, “far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent adrift at sea. 26I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, dangers among false brothers; 27I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches.”

He then moved on to say that he was, “caught up to the third heaven.” That he “was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak” (II Corinthians 11:22–12:6). The “third heaven,” as our group last Wednesday

evening knows, is the dwelling place of God – it is the Heaven where the Father is seated on His Throne and Christ is at His right side and the Spirit hovers and the 24 Elders bow and the angels worship.

Generally speaking, no one gets to visit unless they are physically dead. Again, I want to stress, this is just my opinion. What we know for sure is that Paul got up, and walked on his own two feet, back into the city, full of the people who just stoned him.

That's a supernatural miraculous healing at the minimum. No matter what you think, God intervened in the physical world to restore Paul. Then God further intervened in the affairs of man by protecting him and his friends from additional violence.

When I say city, I'm being very generous. The chances that someone could go back into the city without the murderers knowing is slim, at best. After the Lord restored Paul, He no doubt directed him to go back into Lystra where he was supernaturally protected from further harm.

④ Okay, why? Why would God fix Paul and then protect him only after the fact. Why allow him to be

stoned in the first place? As with why the Holy Spirit didn't just enable him to speak and understand Lycaonian, it's multifaceted.

1 Part of the reason was to duplicate for Paul what he had perpetrated upon Stephen back in chapter 7. Not as a punishment for Paul's earlier actions, but as a relatable experience for Paul's eternal benefit. Both Paul and Stephen endured stoning – it was now a shared experience.

2 Part of the reason was that while God wasn't punishing Paul for something that he had already been forgiven for, it would have made a lot of Christians, especially those who knew Stephen, like Barnabas and John Mark and most of the Jerusalem church, better able to forgive Paul.

3 And part of the reason was to give Paul and the others the faith to trust that God is always in full command. God will at times protect, as He did with Barnabas who was evidently unharmed. At other times He will restore after the fact, as He did with Paul. And at other times He will allow things to run their natural course, as He did with Stephen.



The question is always, will you trust God regardless of His choice? Because Paul and the others did, they were able to move forward the 70 miles to Derbe, where they had further ministry success.

Our guys then returned to the southern coast of modern-day Turkey by retracing their steps and encouraging all the new Christians along the way. The whole journey roundtrip was roughly 625 miles.

⑤ These new Christians are called “disciples.” The Greek is μαθητής (mä-thā-tās), meaning a learner, a pupil, a student, a follower. The “follower” concept is interesting. The method of teaching considered most ideal was the peripatetic method made famous by Aristotle in 335 B.C. I mentioned Alexander the Great, the man who conquered the Persians creating an empire from Italy to India and from Romania to Sudan, only part of which became the Seleucid Empire after his death. Aristotle was his teacher.

Peripatetic comes from the Greek word περιπατέω (pě-řē-pä-tě-ō), meaning to walk around, essentially in a circle – to walk without getting anywhere geographically, but getting everywhere intellectually. Aristotle would walk around and his students, his

μαθητής, would follow him. He would teach them by using the examples and experiences that they encountered along the way. His students would closely follow Him wherever He led. Their goal was to become like their master.

We Christians are first and foremost followers of Christ. You must keep up with Him and follow wherever He leads in order to keep learning from Him and emulating Him to be more and more conformed to Him.

Where He leads, just as we talked about last time, when discussing the final stanza of the Lord's Prayer, where He leads there is trial and tribulation. What? That's unexpected.

Only through struggle can you learn to fully trust Him. Only when His faithfulness is proven in actual need does it become real to you. I could tell you about His faithfulness and how you should always trust in Him and in His purposes no matter how insane things look to your physical eyes, and it would all be theory – it would all be academic – as true as it might be, until proven, it would all be untested hypothetical dogma.

When you allow the calamities of life to be a test of His character in you, His faithfulness is proven, and your faith becomes more than speculation. Your trust in Him has an experiential basis.

The alternative is to forget trust, embrace panic, and the difficulties of this life will become nothing more than temptations to your flesh. Temptations, not tests, because you will fail. The choice rests with you on how you will deal with the obstacles along your path. What I can tell you for sure is that God's Holy Word declares right here that, "It is through many tribulations that we must enter the kingdom of God." That's what God declares.

Jesus commanded us to be disciples when He said in Luke 9:23–26, "If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, this is the one who will save it. 25For what good does it do a person if he gains the whole world, but loses or forfeits himself? 26For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory and the glory of the Father and the holy angels.

What does it actually look like to follow Jesus, to be His disciple?

That's easy... Disciples obey their master, in general, of course, but they most assuredly, they obey their master's primary command. The Christian's master is the Master, Jesus. He gave us a new overarching command that encapsulates all other commands – they are all subsumed under and included within the single new command.

You know it well... It's only two little words ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους (ä-gä-pä-tě ä-l-lā-lüs), “Love one another.” It's plural meaning that all of you love all of the others.

Everything hinges on that, and when we get that, then understanding the Lord's marching orders becomes easy as well. He commanded that we 1) “Go,” that we 2) “make disciples of all the nations,” that we 3) “baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,” and that we 4) “teach them to follow all that Jesus commanded us” (Matthew 28:19&20).

To 1) “Go,” means that we get outside of the church – outside of our comfort zone of other Christians — we engage the world.

To 2) “make disciples of all the nations,” means that we share the Love of Jesus by actively explaining the Gospel Message of Grace for all regardless of who they are... using words when necessary.

To 3) “baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,” means to accept those accepting Christ as fellow Christians... period.

To 4) “teach them to follow all that Jesus commanded us” is to ensure that true Biblical Christianity continues to exist so long as the Lord tarries.

To be a disciple means that you are making disciples.