



October 20, 2024

“How Much Will You Endure?”

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

News:

Wednesday Evenings at Alêtheia 6:30-8:00

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The Jews, by maintaining their unique identity, were a bit mysterious to their neighbors. People fear what they don't know.

We have had things so good for so long that we forget how things are beneath the surface of civility.

Pray, be thankful to God that things aren't worse, try to be a truly Christian Light in the darkness around you.

ACTS 14:1-7 ~

Miraculous signs and wonders serve to strengthen the faith of the open-minded...

People hate change.

If it is Truth from God, it need never fear questioning.

The Konya Plain and the territory north of it was the Roman Province of Galatia.

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!

Both unbelieving Jews and pagan Gentiles joined forces against the Christians.

Pisidia, Phrygia, and Lycaonia.

Paul and Barnabas are identified as Apostles in verse 4. As Apostles they are founders of Christianity.

They continued to preach the Gospel, but they were adaptable.

What genuine Christian ministry, or Christian person, is not required to persevere through trouble and persecution? (I Peter 4, II Timothy 3:10-12, Hebrews 12:6).

ACTS 14:8–13 ~

When you compare this first major recorded healing wrought through the Apostle Paul with the first major recorded healing wrought through the Apostle Peter accompanied by the Apostle John...

Leaped is ἄλλομαι (hāl-lō-mī). Acts 3 & 14, and John 4:14.

Paul saw that he had faith... (Romans 8:28).

Good is a perspective, isn't it?

Lead us...

...not into temptation...

...but deliver us from evil.

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

Name _____ Address _____
 Phone _____ Email _____

Last week we saw our missionary team driven out of Pisidian Antioch by jealous Jews. It would be natural to wonder why the Jews would become so jealous that they enlisted the help of pagans who worshipped multiple false gods to persecute fellow Jews who still worshipped the One True God.

Jews had lived in the area for generations but, like everywhere else Jews landed, they never assimilated into the fabric of the local culture and so they were always these odd ducks in every town and village in the Roman Empire. They were always a distinctive, somewhat isolated, community within the larger community. They still are today...

By maintaining their unique religion, culture, and identity, they were secretive enough and standoffish enough that they were always a bit mysterious to their neighbors. People fear what they don't know.

Fear inevitably turns to hostility when a little tension is added to a situation. Hostility can easily turn to violence, and, for the Jews over the millennia, it often did. You would be hard-pressed to think of a people who have been more persecuted than the Jews.

The Jews living among the Gentiles back then walked a thin line between acceptance and persecution from the Gentile majority. Part of the reason for the acceptance of the Jews was the belief that they appeased a different deity. They brought luck because of their extremely devout practices.

The Jews were mysterious, but they were also mystical to the Gentiles. There was a certain begrudging respect given to them. In many cases the Jews in a town enjoyed a bit of influence. But that could evaporate in a heartbeat if the Gentiles thought that they were defective Jews. If the Gentiles thought that their Jewish neighbors were practicing a false Judaism they would turn against them.

Paul and Barnabas were teaching a different Judaism as far as any of the people back then could understand and so their teaching, if left unchallenged, would undermine the Judaism of those rejecting Jesus as Messiah. It was vital to the treatment of the local Jews to expose the Christians as dangerous heretics and run them off, or even kill them.

Even with all of that it still seems like an overreaction to modern people. Something we seem to forget is that

people are truly vile. We, in America, have had things so good for so long that we forget that throughout time and still today in much of the world, people are forced to pick a side and, once you do, the other side becomes your mortal enemy who may actively try to exterminate you. I was thinking about the religious turmoil of the 16th century again.

By the mid-to-late 1500's every person in the United Kingdom and Europe had to choose whether they were Catholics or Protestants and eventually, if Protestants, which flavor. The choice you made could result in having your family brutalized, your property seized or destroyed, and perhaps even imprisonment, torture, and death.

The government's position changed from one to the other at different times and in different places. Once the opposition got into power all bets were off.

Imagine living on a small property outside of town and a new ruler with a different take on Christianity comes to power. A gang of his soldiers show up at your door. It's not a social call and you'll be lucky to live through it.

We are so shocked, dismayed, and distressed at the division in America today, but it is nothing compared to what it was in the past, what it is elsewhere, or to what it may soon become. Pray, be thankful to God that things aren't worse, try to be a truly Christian Light in the darkness around you.

Our guys were driven out of Antioch due to persecution. That does not mean that they were politely invited to leave. The Via Sebaste turned southeast, and they followed it to Iconium, modern-day Konya, Turkey.

If they had not had a specific reason to go to Pisidian Antioch they could have saved themselves a lot of time and sandal leather by taking the shortcut over to Iconium. Remember the reason they went to Antioch from Cyprus was because Sergius Paulus, the Proconsul there, had family in the city.

Evidently not enough family, to save our guys from trouble though... so after a few days travel the missionaries came to Iconium...

Acts 14:1–7, 11 In Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a way that a

large number of people believed, both of Jews and of Greeks. 2But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brothers. 3Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be performed by their hands. 4But the people of the city were divided; and some sided with the Jews, while others, with the apostles. 5And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to treat them abusively and to stone them, 6they became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region; 7and there they continued to preach the gospel.

Even though in Antioch Paul announced that he was abandoning the Jews and going to the Gentiles, we see here that he only meant in that town. He wasn't taking the rejection of Jesus by some of the Antiochian Jews as reason to ignore all Jews.

Notice that, just as in the previous stop, many people both Jews and Gentiles did believe the Gospel Message. But, of course, also as in Antioch, there were Jews who saw it as heresy.

Here we also see that miraculous signs and wonders serve to strengthen the faith of the open-minded, but do not result in unbelievers changing their minds. In fact, the supernatural confirmations accompanying the Gospel only serve to deepen the resolve of unbeliever's rejection and cause them to become more violent.

When you think about the amazing things that Jesus did and how every time, instead of causing unbelievers to reconsider Him and His claims, it only served to further inflame their rage against Him.

People hate change. Change feels like chaos. People worry that if one thing changes it might mean that other things in their world are not stable either. You see it feels like you're in control when the future unfolds as predicted. It's far more comfortable when nothing challenges your worldview – when what you know and believe seems unassailable. Conversely you feel out-of-control when your beliefs are questioned.

For the majority of people such feelings are so uncomfortable that without conscience thought they will rage against it, double down, dig in ever deeper until

they are so hopelessly entangled in their web of dogmatic beliefs that they will run from their cognitive dissonance and work to feed and to confirm their biases.

It's important to know that in order to understand how people behave. It's more important to know that in order to keep yourself from being such a person. Remember, if it is Truth from God, it need never fear questioning. It will stand even if every human and every demon in unison denies it.

Iconium was over 100 miles away – probably a week-long journey for our friends. It is the modern-day city of Konya, home to more than 2 million people. It is the center of the Sufi Muslim religion. The Sufis are kind of like the Pentecostals of the Muslim world and are best known for their spiritual dance of the Whirling Dervishes.

Konya is also renowned for their handmade rugs. I have one I bought in Turkey that is similar to this one, although mine is more intricate and all the different colors of it, the blacks, browns, cremes, etc., are the natural wool color of variously colored sheep used.

Verse 2 could indicate that some of the hostile Jews from Pisidian Antioch had followed the guys to Iconium and were involved in stirring up trouble for them there as well. We know for sure that the troublemakers from both Antioch and Iconium will follow them to their next stop in Lystra.

Antioch was the Roman sister city to Lystra, which was founded by the Romans to guard the Via Sebaste Road to Antioch and to Iconium. Inscriptions from Lystra show Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and the local Lycaonian languages were in use there at the time.

While I'm on that the whole area of the Konya Plain and the territory north of it was the Roman Province of Galatia at the time of Paul's ministry there, hence the Letter to the Galatians in our Bible.

It was called Galatia because the Gauls had expanded from central Europe, the area of France, Switzerland, and Austria into central Turkey centuries earlier. The Gauls were a branch of the Celtic people. Their relatives in western Ireland still speak Gaelic... meaning the language of the Gauls, or the Galatians, as the Romans called them.

Whatever the particulars, whether their Antiochian antagonists traveled to Iconium or later joined the party in Lystra, the gist is that both unbelieving Jews and pagan Gentiles from the region joined forces in Iconium against the Christians trying to get them executed by public stoning.

The guys became aware of the threat and departed for Lystra about 25 miles to the southwest. We've talked about Pisidia in relation to Pisidian Antioch. Last week I said that Antioch wasn't actually in Pisidia but was right on the border of it. The city was in Phrygia.

Here, in relation to Lystra and Derbe, we have the area called Lycaonia and the local language I mentioned earlier. These smaller sub-areas were kingdoms or city-states in an earlier era, since subsumed into the Roman Province of Galatia.

If the Canadians conquered America and turned the whole northwestern part into a single province called New Montreal, our descendants remaining here would still call themselves Montanans.

Here's the thing to note, Paul and Barnabas are identified as Apostles in verse 4. As Apostles they are

founders of Christianity. What's interesting is that they leave Iconium, just as they had earlier left Antioch, because of persecution and threats, but they don't abandon their mission.

They continued to preach the Gospel but moved on to new territory and new people – they were adaptable. That's worth thinking about. Oftentimes we judge God's Will by figurative doors being opened or closed. I have seen many times, where a Christian person feels compelled by God to do a particular thing, but when they encounter the slightest resistance, they conclude that they were wrong, or more typically, that God was just testing them and has changed His mind.

If I had given up on Alêtheia because doors closed the doors would have never opened. If I abandoned my call to preach because of opposition I would have quit every Sunday afternoon for the last 20 plus years.

At the same time, things have happened to change the course or direction or focus of this church. How can a person know whether opposition is to be endured and overcome or whether it is time to move on?

At times that's incredibly difficult to know. Obviously, prayer is the answer. I might add that God's not in the business of changing His mind. If you are absolutely certain that He's called you to accomplish a thing, it would be rare indeed that He was just kidding.

I am not aware of any genuine Christian ministry that does not require perseverance through trouble and persecution. Reread chapter 4 of Peter's First Epistle. He declares that our fiery ordeal is a testing of our faith. A means to refine and solidify it as we lose confidence in our flesh and learn to trust fully in the Lord.

The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy just before He was to be executed in II Timothy 3:10-12, 10Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, 11persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me! 12Indeed, all who want to live in a godly way in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

The Bible tells us that the Lord "disciplines those whom He loves" (Hebrews 12:6), and that "judgement begins

with the household of God” – it begins with us first (I Peter 4:17) and again, the purpose is to refine our faith, so that we will trust in the Lord no matter what – no matter what.

We continue...

Acts 14:8–13, 8In Lystra a man was sitting whose feet were incapacitated. He had been disabled from his mother’s womb, and had never walked. 9This man was listening to Paul as he spoke. Paul looked at him intently and saw that he had faith to be made well, 10and he said with a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet!” And the man leaped up and began to walk. 11When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have become like men and have come down to us!” 12And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, since he was the chief speaker. 13Moreover, the priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.

When you carefully compare this first major recorded healing wrought through the Apostle Paul it is nearly

identical to the first major recoded healing wrought through the Apostle Peter accompanied by the Apostle John back in Acts chapter 3.

Both disabled men were lame from birth and neither had ever walked before. Both were near temple gates explicitly in chapter 3 and implicitly here. Both men had the requisite faith in Jesus to be healed. Both leaped for joy afterward. That word translated as leaped is ἄλλομαι (hāl-lō-mī) and it occurs only three times in the Bible. In chapter 3, here in chapter 14, and once by Jesus in John 4:14, where He said, “whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never be thirsty; but the water that I will give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up (ἄλλομαι, leaping up) to eternal life.”

Peter and John first gazed at their target intently and here Paul does the same. In both cases the people want to worship the Apostles, and in both cases that worship is soundly rejected by them.

God is telling us through Luke that Paul is every bit the Apostle that Peter and John were and that’s incredibly important because Paul was responsible for about half of the New Testament. It is his theological

understanding and explanation of the New Covenant through the lens of the Old Testament largely defines Biblical Christianity.

Paul better be a Jesus appointed Apostle with the same standing as Peter and John or we need to seriously reevaluate Christian doctrine.

Beyond that, the simple fact is that God recreated a man's body again. It's remarkable that someone recently crippled could throw away their crutches and stand, but for someone who has never used their legs before to leap up in the air and walk is how God rolls.

Notice that this man was listening to Paul and notice further that Paul saw that he had faith... Not faith in Paul, not faith that he would walk, faith in the Jesus Paul preached. That is the faith to be made well – Saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Such faith guarantees an eternity with a perfect body to go along with everything else that is perfect. Miracles still happen. God still intervenes in the affairs of man. He does so for His purposes. His purposes are always to advance the Kingdom – always. Romans 8:28, And we know that in all things God works for the good of

those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

God does work all things for the good. Good is a perspective, isn't it? The Cat-Griz football game every year has an outcome that some think is good, and others don't.

If God enters the mix no one else's opinion matters. What He determines is good, is by definition good – go Cats. The point is that we must have our perspective aligned with His in order to see the same good that He sees. “If we love Him,” we “are called according to His purposes” and that means we want what is good not from a human perspective, but from God's perspective.

Maybe for the greatest eternal good of God, I need to suffer, maybe you need to be more Christ-focused, maybe our friend needs to die. This life will throw you curve ball after curve ball. That the part of the Lord's Prayer that goes, “Lead me.” Heavenly Father please enable me to understand that You, the Author of all things, are leading me through my life. Remind me daily that it will be a constant struggle, that there will be all manner of trials and tribulations.

Let every curve ball be nothing more than a test of Your character in me. Let every difficulty strengthen my trust in You and then these things cannot be temptations to take control and distrust You. They will be victories won by You in me instead of battles lost by me pretending to be You. That's the "not into temptation," part.

The rest of it comes as a consequence. Trials that test and purify faith "deliver one from evil." All evil, both internal and external, both physical and spiritual, both now and forevermore.