

Let us see secondly *the perversity of unconverted man's heart*. At one time the people of Lystra were planning to do sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas. They thought they were gods. But later on, they changed their minds completely. Jews come from Antioch and Iconium, and persuade them that Paul ought not to live any more. Instead of thinking he should be worshipped, they decided that he should die. Instead of sacrificing to him, they stone him and drag him out of the city as dead. What a change! How could they move from one to the other? There is only one way to explain it. It is the perversity of the unconverted heart. It is unstable, and cannot stay in a settled place. It moves from hate to love, and back again. There is no stability, because there is no knowledge of God. In ignorance, the sinner lurches from one thing to another. Let us not be surprised to see these things.

Let us see finally *Paul's godly courage*. He had been stoned, and left for dead. The people of Lystra had dragged him out of the city, for his body to rot and decompose. But God had other ideas! Paul was not quite dead. Whilst the disciples gathered, he came back to life. God was with him, and he rose up. And then he went back into the city! What an amazing thing to do that was. The people had already murdered him once, or so they thought. But Paul went back into the very place where all this had just occurred. Why did he do this? At first, it seems like the act of a mad man. But we must seek for the wisdom of God in it. And when we look for it, we see it was a very wise thing to do. Paul would be able to leave Lystra whenever he pleased. In fact, he would go the next day. But the believers in the city would have to stay behind. They would have to face the hatred of the world around them every day. They had their homes, their families and all their lives in Lystra. They could not so easily flee. And if the Jews saw that they could so easily destroy the church, they would try to do so all the more. Paul saw all of this. He went back into the city on purpose. He knew he had to set an example to the believers. He must show them courage in the face of severe hardship. He must show them that the Lord was sufficient for even the worst situation. He must show them that God could be trusted, however it humanly seemed.

Here is a lesson which we must learn too. The hatred of the world has not become any less, though it is often better disguised. Our calling is still to serve God in the places where we are. His word still says that we must live for him in the world, not depart from it. We must not be of the world, but we must be in it for at least a time. And in this world, we must be bold. We must not run away whenever Christian truth is denied. We must not flee whenever God's word is opposed. We must believe that God will be sufficient for us. We must be willing to stand up for our Saviour at all times. He has gone to the cross for us. Cannot we face a little opposition for him? He died, and rose from the dead. Cannot we believe that God will own our cause too? He reigns from the right hand of God. Cannot we trust that he will take care of how things turn out? These are hard questions. But every Christian must face them, if he would be faithful to his Lord.

Expository thoughts on **The Acts Of The Apostles**

Daily Bible Reading Notes

Week 10 (Chapter 13:29-14:20)

Grace Church Belper

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Acts 13:29-37

29 "Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. 30 But God raised him from the dead. 31 He was seen for many days by those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses to the people. 32 And we declare to you glad tidings - that promise which was made to the fathers. 33 God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that he has raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm: 'You are my son, today I have begotten you.' 34 And that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken thus: 'I will give you the sure mercies of David.' 35 Therefore he also says in another Psalm: 'You will not allow your holy one to see corruption.' 36 For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption; 37 but he whom God raised up saw no corruption." There were lots of things that Luke mentioned only very briefly. There were many things that the Spirit of God did not intend him to dwell on. But on other things, he gives us much more detail. These are things which the Lord means us to note carefully. Here, the first missionaries are preaching the gospel in the Gentile world. They are showing us what the good news for non-Jews is. This is the gospel which the Lord gave to the church. Let us not just read it as an interesting event in the history of the world. Let us study it as something of vital importance for our own souls.

There is one great point in this part of Paul's sermon. He has come to his climax. And this is it. *Jesus Christ is certainly risen from the dead.* He really suffered on the cross. He really died. He was really buried in a real grave. And just as really, he rose again from that grave - "God raised him from the dead" (v30).

Paul is in no doubt as to just how Jesus is alive. People say that a loved one is still alive, because he lives on in their hearts. A famous musician or artist is not dead, because he lives on through his music or art. This or that teacher is not dead, because his ideas are still influencing many lives. Or they suggest that the dead are still, from somewhere, watching us and seeing what we're doing. The Bible knows nothing about that idea, and says the opposite (Ecclesiastes 9:5, Luke 16:19-31). None of these meanings are what the Bible means when it says that Jesus is alive. What the apostles meant was, he was not dead. He is more alive in every way than any person in the universe. His body did not rot or decay. There is no box with his bones in it. There is no place where his remains were left. There are no remains, because he is more alive than we are.

Paul speaks of him being raised from the tomb. He says that he was seen by witnesses. He states that this was the opposite of seeing corruption and decay. He contrasts him with David, who had remained in his grave. In every way that he

understand Lycaonian (verse 11). They did not know what the people were saying. But before long they found out. This was their response. Here we have their words in reply. We see their deep distress. They had come to turn people away from pagan lies. Christ had acted to show his superior power. Jesus had healed the man where a lifetime in paganism had not. But in response, they decided to sacrifice to pagan gods! No wonder the apostles were so distressed. No wonder they tore their clothes and cried out! (v14). Let us see what we can learn for ourselves from their words.

Let us see first what is said here about *creation*. God is said to be "the living God". And he is responsible for everything that exists anywhere in the universe. Whether in the heaven, the earth, or the sea, he made it. It exists because of his will. It exists by his power. He conceived it; he spoke it into existence; he upholds it now. He is the author of life, and all things. He made us, and is worthy of all our worship and praise. We have nothing except what was crafted by him. This is what makes sin so sinful - it is done against him. In him we live, and move, and have our being. We sin with the energy he gives us. We sin against the one to whom we everything.

Here is a truth which we must hold on to at all times. It is a truth that lies at the root of many things. Once this foundation is lost, the whole house will come falling down. This truth is heavily attacked in our time. There is a reason for that. The world knows that we are accountable to our Maker. If it can deny his creation, it gains some excuse for denying him. God becomes just a fellow passenger, instead of our Creator and Lord. He becomes just another being, instead of the one who is the origin of all. But the Bible will not let us off so easily. Paul stated that God had made these things plain. God had watched as the nations had gone their own way. But he had left them with a clear witness (v16). He continues to provide. He continues to order the world, so that it produces good things. He continues to give life, and to prevent the created order falling into chaos. He does these things for all - so that all are without excuse. These things could not be said of the pagan gods. They were thought of as malicious, and full of unpredictable rage. They could not explain how food, and rains, and all such things, continued to arrive. Such order and provision could not be their work. It must be the work of a loving creator God.

Let us not make a mistake about this. God's word says that we have no excuse. According to Paul, men have been given the truth (Romans 1:18). The things of God are clear to them - God has made them so (1:19). The creation of the world clearly reveals his eternal power and deity (1:20) - "so that they are without excuse". The problem is that these things cannot be seen. The problem is that men have no eyes to see them. They prefer to chose lies to truth. They cannot keep themselves alive, but they will deny the very author of life itself.

just seen. No - they immediately moved to praise their pagan gods. There is only one explanation for this. It was not rational. It was not reasonable. It was an act of those in gross spiritual darkness. It was the response of people who had no understanding of spiritual truth. He was telling them about the true God; they thought of their idols. He was preaching a Saviour; they were planning idolatry.

Such things did not finish in the first century. They are not only to be found in places with temples to Zeus. Such things have continued in all places, at all times. The human heart is still just as dark. It is still just as full of foolishness. It does not find it any easier today to escape from the deceit of false religion. How many are there who sit in Christian churches every week, and yet misunderstand all that is said? How many are there who hear about salvation by free grace - and go home thinking they are acceptable to God? How many hear that Christ is the only Saviour - and still assume that a little religion is what they need? How many hear about faith alone - and go away trusting their works? How many confuse hearing with obeying? How many mix up a morally respectable life with the true holiness of a Christian life? The answers to these questions are clear to everyone who thinks for a moment. Self-delusion has not died. It is present in every place where God's people meet. Many hear about conversion every week, have never experienced it, but go away without seeing any problem with it. Many hear each Sunday that they should worship God above all things - and then return to six days of serving only themselves. No doubt our idolatry is more subtle than that at Lystra. We have no pagan temples. But we worship our careers, our goals, our pleasures. These are all the same in the eyes of God. It is not the obedience which the gospel requires. It will not prevent us from being damned.

Acts 8:14-18

14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out 15 and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, 16 who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. 17 Nevertheless, he did not leave himself without witness, in that he did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. 18 And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them. 19 Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. 20 However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

The idolatry of the people of Lystra appalled Barnabas and Paul. They could not

could, he made clear that Jesus was really, physically, truly, alive. One of our hymns says "You ask me how you know he lives; he lives within my heart". Paul did not speak like that. He said, I know he lives, because the tomb is empty; because he is not dead.

This is the Christian faith. Jesus is not just an example. He is not just an inspiration. He is not just a teacher of good and holy things. He is more than a prophet. He is more than even a perfectly righteous man. He is the author, creator, sustainer and giver of all life. He is alive himself and gives spiritual and eventually resurrection life to all who trust in him. This is not an optional belief. This is not something that we discuss as doubtful, or leave to one side. It was right at the heart of what the apostles proclaimed. It was the very thing which Jesus told them to spread to the ends of the world. To deny this fact, is to deny the Christian faith. To suppose that Jesus is dead, is to contradict a non-negotiable fact. Only by trusting in a risen Lord can we be saved. If the Lord is dead, then we are still in our sins. If we do not believe that he is the living Saviour, we shall be damned. Christians should not treat those who deny this fact as wise, or clever, or maybe having something interesting to say. They should not look upon them as misguided and mistaken but yet still good Christian folk. They should look upon them as the enemies of the faith, whose souls are still in chains.

Paul put the resurrection of God's Son right at the climax of his message. He finds everything pointing to it. It was, he says, the fulfilment of all the promises that had been given before. The "promise which was made to the fathers" (v32) was only realised when Jesus left the tomb. It was what the prophets and the psalmists spoke about. When they saw the great victory of God, it was achieved through his Son triumphing over death. Life, forgiveness and salvation would come to God's people in this way, and in no other. Christ rose again as the Messiah. He was the Son of David, who was greater than David in every way.

Let us note how Paul read his Bible. He found its great promises leading to Christ. There were promises in the Psalms of someone not seeing corruption. But David, who spoke those words, saw corruption. He was the greatest king Israel ever had. Yet when he died, he rotted in the grave. Therefore, the words did not speak of him. Therefore, they spoke of the Christ. David was a holy man of God. But he was not the holy one who would defeat death. This honour belongs to the Lord Jesus.

We must ask ourselves if we really live as if these things are true. They are true; that is not the question. The question is, are our lives reflecting the truth, or reflecting lies? Jesus is not dead! He is reigning at God's right hand. His kingdom shall never end. His enemies shall be destroyed. Nothing done against his will can ultimately succeed. He is bringing all things into submission to himself. There will be a great day when he will be revealed. Every knee shall bow to him. Then,

nothing that was done for his honour will be thought to have been done in vain. Nothing attempted for him will be said to have been a waste of time. Sin will be seen as complete foolishness, and time frittered away in worldly things will be seen as wasted. Do we believe these things? They are true. Let us say to ourselves, every day, "Jesus is alive" - and then let us serve him.

Acts 13:38-42

38 "Therefore, let it be known to you, brethren that through this man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; 39 and by him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses. 40 Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you: 41 'Behold, you despisers, marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, a work which you will by no means believe, though one were to declare it to you.'"

These are the final words of Paul's speech. This is what was left ringing in his hearers' ears. Here is the conclusion of the first great sermon of the first missionaries to our part of the world. Here are the words of a man filled with the Spirit of God.

Let us see from them that *the way of salvation is through believing in Christ*. It is Christ that Paul preached at Antioch. It was Christ who was declared as the apostles went throughout the world. They preached Christ as the promised one. They preached him as the holy one of God. They declared him as God's Son. Salvation and life, they said, were in him, and in him alone.

Salvation is not gained by good works and good deeds. This was the mistake which many of the Jews made. This is a mistake which many have made since. This is a mistake which many are still making today. They think that Christianity must be about "doing the right thing". They think that there are things which Christians are meant to do and to believe. They think that if they go along with these things, all shall be well. They suppose that because their lives look similar enough to those of believers, therefore they cannot have a different destiny from them in the end. They certainly cannot end up being as different as heaven and hell! And so they comfort themselves, that all will be well with their souls.

These are ideas which the Bible contradicts time and again. On nearly every page, it tells us the very opposite. Salvation is not something which we can ever earn. God's laws are not the pathway to heaven. They cannot atone for our sin. They are merely statements of what we ought to have done and been. Moses did not announce that it was necessary to keep more of God's laws than not. He announced that it was necessary to keep every last one of them. The law of Moses could not justify (v39). It could never declare a man to be right with God. It only

It is no coincidence that there are many healings in the Bible. They are there for a reason. In them, we learn spiritual truth. Physical miracles were performed. But they were not performed just for show. They have something to teach us. They are all pictures of the saving ministry of Christ. They all illustrate something about his work within souls. Likewise, those who were ill and diseased are all pictures too. They show us our state in sin.

When sin first entered the world, disease and death did too (Genesis 3, Romans 5:12). If there had never been sin, there would have never been sickness. This man is a picture of our sad state in sin. We are spiritual cripples. We cannot experience life as it is meant to be lived. Whole areas of it are completely cut off from us. We cannot know God. We cannot appreciate spiritual things. We cannot have fellowship with God's people. We are limited to the things which are below. We can live only in the world of sight and touch. Just as the man had legs but could not use them, so it is with our souls. And this is a condition which we can do nothing about. The man could not make himself walk, and we cannot find our own way to God. It needs a miracle of powerful grace.

Let us see secondly a picture of *the great power of the gospel to save*. As this man listened to Paul preach, Paul saw something in him. He saw "that he had faith to be healed" (verse 9). He spoke, and the man was healed right away. He did not begin to stagger around - he leaped and walked! (verse 10). He was healed fully, and instantly.

This is a picture of the saving power of Christ. He can save to the uttermost all those who believe. He is not limited in his ability to save. In a moment, he may give the worst of sinners wholeness and life. It is all his work, and there is no restraint on his power. It does not matter that they are dead in sins, and with no power to help themselves. He can do it all.

Reader, have you turned to Christ? Salvation does not come by magic. It does not come whilst we pay no attention to the things of God. It comes through the word of God. It comes through faith in Jesus Christ. It comes through trusting the one who is preached. Jesus came to this earth, and lived the life we should have lived. He died the death we deserve to die, under God's punishment and curse. We must turn from our own way, to him.

Finally we see in these verses *the deep darkness and ignorance of the human heart*. A great miracle was done through Paul. He was there, preaching Jesus Christ. He was a Jew, and was preaching the Messiah who had come from the Jews. But look at what happened when the man was healed! The people of Lystra immediately thought of their pagan gods. They did move to ask Paul what the meaning of the healing was. They did not think about what he had been preaching to them. They did not stop to consider what was the significance of what they had

is costly. It cost the Lord Jesus his very life. It will cost us a great deal of effort and trouble. This is the price we must pay. We must count the cost. Jesus Christ demands our all. If we will not give him all, we cannot be his disciples. This was the attitude of Paul and Barnabas. They set the believers an example of this mindset. They were set on the Lord's work; this must come first of all. Let us have the same heart and mind as they did. Ask yourself - what troubles have I taken for the gospel? What difficulties have I faced for the Lord? Do I always shrink back when hardship comes? Do I treat my own peace and ease as the most important thing? How can I become more like Christ? How can I better honour my Lord? What is our great delight and joy? What do we long to hear about? Is it about the gospel progressing, despite the pains it brings? Is our goal that the word should be preached, whatever the world may think? We live in an age of great comfort and little hardship in the Western world. We must be careful that it does not blunt our spiritual life. We must seek to be bold for the Lord. We must give thanks to God for every blessing we have. But we must always put God first. The gospel must be spread.

Acts 14:8-13

8 And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked. 9 This man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, 10 said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked. 11 Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" 12 And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 13 Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes.

After fleeing from Iconium, the missionaries came to Lystra. Their time in Lystra was very eventful! There is nothing in the Bible that tells us anything about Lystra apart from what we have here in Acts. Let us see what we can learn from it.

Let us see firstly in the crippled man *a picture of the sad state which sin has brought us to*. Like the temple cripple in Acts 3, he had never walked. He was "a cripple from his mother's womb". He was "without strength in his feet" (v8). What a miserable condition to be in! He had been dependent upon others all of his life. There had never been a day when he had been able to take himself from one room to another. He had needed everything brought to him. He had never been able to climb a hill, or run a race. All of these things had always been shut off from him.

sets out the standard, from which we have fallen far short. The law tells us that we must be perfectly holy. But we have not been. The law tells us that we must be. Yet we still have not! And if we go to the law again, it will again tell us what God requires of us. And in doing so, it shows us more of what we have not done. The law of Moses was a great and wonderful thing. It contained the very words of God. It revealed the perfection and beauty of God's being. But in doing so, it revealed how far short we fall. Anyone who thinks that they have "done enough" should read God's word more carefully. They should study more closely, the perfection of God's holiness, and his utter and entire righteousness and hatred of sin. They should compare more closely the great gulf between God's requirements, and their own hearts. If they truly do that, they will soon come to agree with Paul. We cannot be justified through the law.

To be justified, we must rather believe. Through Jesus Christ is preached to us, the forgiveness of sins. Justification is in him. He has been raised from the dead. He has defeated sin, death and the grave. He has been raised up by God, to declare that he was his perfect Son. If we would be accepted by God, it must be in Christ. If we are in him, then we are justified from "all things". The worst of offences have been dealt with by his death. He endured the wrath of God against the vilest and most appalling of sins. The whole burden of all the sin of all God's people was borne by him, and the perfect price was paid. He stood in the place of those who believe. He, through the punishment poured out upon him, breached the gap between God's perfect law and our wicked hearts. This is what is preached to us in the gospel. It is the best news there could ever be. It is news, Paul said, preached to us (v38). It was not just for a few Jews in Palestine. It is for the whole world.

Let us see finally that *preachers of the gospel must announce serious warnings, as well as good news*. That is what Paul did. He had just declared the best thing any of his hearers had ever heard. The Son of God had visited this world - but not in wrath. He did not come to damn us, and defeat sin by condemning every sinner to hell. He came in mercy. He came himself to be damned, and defeat sin through sin being condemned in him. And this salvation, was to be freely offered to all. Every person who hears, is invited to come to Christ, and to believe. But this was not all that there was to say. Paul also spoke about what would happen if we do not believe. He warned how easy it is to let these things pass us by. He said that it was no marvel if many looked upon the crucified Christ, but did not yield to him. The prophets had said it would be so, long before. And those prophets had warned, that those who did not believe, would certainly perish.

The Son of God has shed his precious blood. If this is what salvation costs, how can we be saved any other way? If this is the price which must be paid for our souls, then what could we give in its place?

No doubt these words were especially for the Jews. Paul was in a synagogue. The prophets had spoken especially to Israel. The end of Judaism was near at hand. God would finally do away with the nation in just a few short years. No doubt Paul knew of these things. He was aware that a new world had already arrived, in which descent from Abraham meant nothing at all. But these words are not only for 1st century Jews. They are recorded by the Spirit of God for our learning today. If we do not believe, we shall be condemned. Salvation is in Christ; it is nowhere else. God has warned us; we have no excuse. Reader, have you fled to the Lord Jesus? Is he your refuge for the day of God's wrath? Is your confidence in yourself that you are alright in the eyes of God, or is it resting upon him? These are vital questions. We must make sure that we can give a good answer to them.

Acts 13:42-47

42 So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. 43 Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. 44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. 45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. 46 Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. 47 For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

What a day it was at the synagogue in Antioch! They had never heard any message like it. But now the messenger had finished. The sermon was over. Now it was down to each of them to respond to it. What would the reaction be? These verses tell us a great deal about what happens when the gospel is preached. Let us examine them carefully.

The first thing to notice from these verses is that *when the gospel is preached, people react differently*. A division takes place. Those who had sat next to each other in the synagogue now disagree. We are told that many Jews and "devout proselytes" followed the missionaries (v43). But other Jews, when the next Sabbath came (v45), were filled with envy. As the gospel was preached, these Jews were "contradicting and blaspheming". Other Gentiles though had longed to hear this preaching; they had "begged" for it (v42).

This seems very obvious. Not everyone believes. Some are very much opposed. But this is not just any group of people. It is those who had met as worshippers of the true God. It was those who had had the same teaching. It was those who had,

gospel must go on. Having been ill-treated in one city, they went to another. Having seen their fellow country-men oppose them in one place, they preached to them in another. And in Iconium they met with great opposition too. Once again, many Jews refused to believe. And they were not content merely to disbelieve themselves. They stirred up others who they feared might believe themselves. They "poisoned their minds against the brethren". Their opposition led to violence, and even an attempt to stone them.

But what did the apostles do in the face of all this? They preached on. Verse 3 says "therefore they stayed a long time". Why did they stay a long time? Because of all the opposition. They refused to flee when trouble came. They knew that the disciples would not have that luxury. Paul and Barnabas were visitors; the new disciples were in their own homes. If Paul and Barnabas fled, the disciples' would be weak too. And when the apostles were chased out of Iconium, what did they do then? They did not return to Syria and home. They went on to the next cities, and preached the gospel there too. What a sight this is! They are hated and opposed. Their very lives are in danger. But, they keep on doing the Lord's work.

They were not fanatics of foolish men. They did not embrace trouble for the sake of it. When they saw that their lives could be lost, they did not remain. They refused to bend to empty threats; but they sought to spare their lives. They saw no value in being martyred for its own sake. Their concern was above this. Their concern was to preach the gospel of Christ, and pay whatever cost that brought.

The gospel will often bring trouble. It will often divide. The more boldly and the more clearly it is preached, the more certain this is. Some will be driven by the bold preaching to Christ. Others will be driven to hatred and rage. This is what the gospel does. But none of these things should be our concern. Our duty is to live faithfully for Jesus, whatever it brings. There is work to be done. There are souls that need to be saved. The Lord needs courageous followers. If we are cowardly, then little will be done. We must not faint because the opposition does not give up. We must remember that the Lord still reigns, and all things are in his hands. We must not despair because of trouble. We must continue, and not lose heart. This was what the apostles did.

The book of Acts has one great theme. It is about the spread of the gospel. It is about how the word went to the ends of the earth. This is God's great concern. This is what the Lord Jesus commanded. This is what the Holy Spirit took care to record in his book. The Bible tells us little about the world's politics or rulers. It has few words to spare on worldly empires and such things. Its great concern is to tell us about the word of God, and how sinners can be saved. We ought to learn a lesson from this. Our thinking needs to come into line with God's. God's concern is not that we should have easy lives, and arrive in heaven undisturbed. God's concern is that lost souls should hear about his Son, that they might be saved. This

must rejoice, because Christ has already won the war. The outcome is certain, and the church's enemies are already doomed. We are not yet in glory. But glory is already in us. We do not have the fullness of the Spirit; but we have the firstfruits.

We must get rid of the idea that the Christian life is meant to be all joy with no pain. We must reject the teaching that the victorious life is one without trouble and continual advance. The apostles did not know anything about these ideas. The early churches had no experience of them. Their joy did not come because they had no pain. Their joy came with their pain - because they had Jesus Christ with it all. This is how we should think too. If we have Christ, then we have all. He is sufficient for us. The riches we have in him are worth more than a thousand deaths. The glory of his person, and the warmth of his love can bring relief from the most awful pains. Our spiritual state is very sad if we do not understand the truth of this. It is those without Christ who ought to be miserable. They might have houses. They might have huge bank accounts. They might have power, and fame, and every kind of comfort and worldly ease. But without Christ, their souls are condemned. They do not know God, and they have no hope in this world. They have no Father in heaven watching over them, and no strength against the devil or sin. They will soon have to leave behind everything they have in this world. Then they will have nothing, except unending pains. Such people ought to be thoroughly miserable. But the believer in Christ, should never be so. The trials God gives us may be very severe. But none of them are so severe that Christ will not be enough for them. None of them will be so terrible that they can even be compared with the value of our Saviour, the Son of God.

Acts 14:1-7

1 Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed. 2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren. 3 Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. 4 But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles. 5 And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them, 6 they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region. 7 And they were preaching the gospel there.

After being thrown out of Antioch, the apostles did not go home. They still had work to do. They pressed on, and went east to Iconium. They had been rejected by the Jews in Antioch; but went straight to the Jews in Iconium.

There is one great and clear lesson in these verses. That is that *the work of the*

up until now, met together every week. The rest of the city might be full of idolatry and false religion. But these people were not. And it was these people, who were now divided by the preaching of the gospel.

Many peoples' motives in religion are not what they seem. The Jews seemed like true seekers after the Lord. But when the gospel came, it exposed their pride. They were full of envy to see so many Gentiles crowding it. Their synagogue was in danger of being swamped! They were happy when some Gentiles came along. When the Jews had the majority, their privileges seemed safe and secure. But now they were in danger of being only a part of the people, and their pride was aroused. Pride had been driving them all along; but had not been exposed in their hearts. This is what the gospel does. It is a message which can only be received by the humble. It tells us what we are really like. It tells us that we deserve no privileges or blessings by God. The best of us has not kept God's law, and needs Jesus so that we might be saved. If we are to be saved, it must be the same way as everyone else - even those we consider the worst. They must be saved by God's grace, and we must be saved with them. Pride leads to God's rejection. Those who judge themselves to be too good to need saving by grace, will not be saved at all. Here is a serious warning to us.

Let us notice secondly *the authority of the Bible*. When Paul and Barnabas turned away from the unbelieving Jews, they did so for a reason. That reason was because the Scriptures told them to. Isaiah the prophet had said that salvation should come to the Gentiles. Now they took that as their command. The prophecy had been spoken many hundreds of years before. But now they took it as their command (verse 47). Isaiah the prophet had written it - but they said, "the Lord has commanded us". They did not quote a direct word they had received from heaven. They quoted the pages of God's book. When the Bible speaks, God speaks. What the Bible said many centuries ago, it also commands to us today. This is what the apostles taught about Scripture. And this is still the truth today. The Bible is not given to us just to interest us or stretch our minds. It is given so that we might obey God's will. It is the standard that shall judge us at the last day. We shall have no excuse for claiming to be ignorant of it. God has given us his word, and expects us to obey it. Let us allow others to call us names, and pretend that it is wiser to do as we please. Let them call us "fundamentalists" or "Bible-bashers". Let us be convinced that God has spoken, and all the names in the world cannot change that fact.

Let us see finally that *Christ's work is completed through his people*. The prophecy spoke about the servant of God. It spoke about God's Messiah. It spoke about him being a light to the ends of the earth. But Jesus never travelled far beyond the borders of Israel. He said that he was sent to the lost sheep of that country. He died just outside Jerusalem, only a few miles from where he was born. But the prophecy was not intended only for Jesus' earthly life. It was intended for the

church, after Christ's rising again. Paul and Barnabas were now doing the Messiah's work. They went out in union with him. They went in his name, under his care and enabled by his power. As they went, Christ went.

The Christian's union with Christ is one of the most precious Bible truths. We were given to him in eternity past. He came into the world, knowing our names and loving us personally. He went to the cross, knowing whose sins he was dying for. When he died, every believer died with him too. When he rose again, we rose with him too. His life is now our life, and we live to serve him. In the days to come, he shall be revealed in glory - and every believer shall be too.

This is a wonderful truth. The Christian's life and work are never of no importance. If we are united to Christ, then Christ's name is upon us. Our work has infinite importance. It is completing the work which he began. Jesus never came to Great Britain. But his servants have. Let us consider this and take heart. Christ is ascended to heaven; but he is at work throughout all the earth.

Acts 13:48-52

48 Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region. 50 But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. 51 But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

What words these are! There is joy; there is suffering. There is believing; there is violent rejection. There are Jews and Gentiles, important men of the world and apostles of God; devout people and vulgar behaviour.

Firstly, we see clearly *that those who believe have been appointed to do so*. The Gentiles who heard the word embraced it. They "were glad and glorified the word of the Lord". They heard, they understood, and they believed. But they did all of these things for a reason. There was something further back, that was the cause of it all. Verse 48 tells us that they had been appointed to eternal life. God had predestined them to do so. His sovereign decree was the real cause of it.

Let us note the words of the Scripture carefully. The Holy Spirit makes no mistakes. The verse does not say that those who believed were appointed to eternal life. It is the other way round. It actually says that those who were appointed to eternal life, believed. There was a way why some of those Gentiles embraced the gospel of Christ. God's predestination had ensured that it would be so. Before they had sought out God, he had been seeking them. Their hearts

embraced Jesus Christ, because God had already been at work. That work had begun in eternity past - God had chosen them to be saved.

This teaching of "election" is written throughout the word of God. It is not a hidden or obscure truth for only a select few. It is explained in simple words, for every believer to embrace. It is easy to understand, though it is very deep. We cannot get to the bottom of it, but the idea is simple enough. The reason why some people believe and others do not, is not ultimately in themselves. Ultimately, it is in God. Left to ourselves, we would all cling on to our sins. Given our own freedom, we would go far away from God and not return. We all have sinful hearts, which cannot repent or truly love God. But God, in his mercy, has chosen some to be saved. He gives them a new heart and a new will. He opens their eyes to see spiritual truth. He draws them to himself, so that they are willing to believe. Salvation is all the work of God.

This is a truth which brings much glory to God. Nothing which we have come from ourselves. Even repenting and believing were gifts from him. Salvation is his work from beginning to end. He loved us long before we loved him. He was drawing us long before we knew anything of it. All the praise belongs to him.

This is a truth which brings much comfort to the believing heart. All things are in the hands of God. Left to ourselves, we will go far astray. But God knows those who are his own. He will ensure that none of them is lost. Salvation is his work, and he will not fail. If he has appointed some to life, then they shall live. Satan, death and hell itself cannot overcome him. They would overcome us in our strength with ease. But they cannot overcome God.

We must then embrace this truth for the glory of God and the good of our souls. It is not a mere idea, for philosophers to discuss. It is a solid rock for every believer to stand upon. God has chosen; and his will shall be done.

Secondly, we see that *suffering and joy often go together*. The apostles were violently opposed. Persecution was stirred up (v50). They were expelled from the region. But they had the great joy of knowing that a church had begun. The believers themselves faced great hardship. Paul and Barnabas were gone, but they were left behind. They were very young in the faith. The only Christian teachers they had known had been chased away. But this did not make them despair. They were "filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (v52). They now knew Jesus Christ. They were now in a walk with God. They had the Spirit of God indwelling them. They knew God's word, and many in their region had accepted it (v49).

We might be surprised that these things can go together. But we should not be. This is often God's way. Believers suffer, because there is a great battle going on. The devil, the world and the flesh are fierce and relentless enemies. But believers