

Acts Chapter 14

In this section, Paul and Barnabas arrive in Iconium, and immediately go into the synagogue to preach, as is their custom. There, they acquire a huge number of followers from both the Jews and gentiles. But once again, the unbelieving Jews stir up trouble, and Paul and Barnabas speak “boldly”. Here also, God grants them “signs and wonders”, but still the hard-hearted Jews refuse to believe. They stir up half the city, to stone Paul and Barnabas, who are then forced to flee to Lystra.

Here, an interesting point is broached. Although they had before relished their persecution, they flee when their lives are threatened by the townsfolk. Only in special circumstances does God call one to stand his ground unto death. In this case, Paul and Barnabas flee to protect their life; a very prudent idea. So should we be wise in such instances. Although there is a time for such, we are never forbidden protecting our lives; only encouraged to be willing to give them up.

In Lystra, they encounter a man with crippled feet. Paul, “steadfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.” Three interesting points are brought up here.

First, it is the *crippled man’s faith* not Paul’s which allows him to be healed. From this, we can derive an overarching principle. Faith does not work by association. We can be involved in the best congregation in the world, have the most faithful and eloquent pastor, and parents who love the word and are faithful to it, but without our *own* faith, we will not have the Spirit in our lives. Only through repentance and faith according to our own faith can we be saved.

Second, Paul *perceived* that he had the faith to be healed. Although this could imply some special knowledge given by the Spirit, such is not stated here, and should not be assumed. Indeed, the language here “steadfastly beholding him” seems to imply that Paul came to the conclusion of the man’s faith through natural means, by observing his actions. For him to do such, would result in an assumption by Paul that the man’s faith would automatically affect his behavior. Passages such as this one put to death the idea of a “powerless” gospel, wherein men are saved, but not changed.

Thirdly, the basic idea is demonstrated, that faith has the power to affect the events in our lives. Not only did his faith affect this man’s actions, but his circumstances were affected. Through this man’s faith, he was

healed, which then went on to affect others as a witness to the apostles, and the one of which they spoke, Jesus Christ.

Then, notice the far reaching effects. The people of Lystra were so impressed by the miracle, that they gathered animals and attempted to make sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas, calling them after the names of their pagan gods. It is undeniable that these people saw an unexplainable event, but their reaction was not well received by the apostles. They tore their clothes and “ran in among the people”. They quickly correct the crowd on their misunderstanding of the circumstances, but still seem to have difficulty stopping them.

Then, in an amazing turn of events, some of the Jews from Antioch and Iconium come to Lystra, and inciting the crowd, persuade them to stone Paul and take him out of the city. There they leave him for dead.

It is a foreign concept to us that such a thing could happen. How could a crowd of people see an incredible miracle, call someone a god, and prepare to make sacrifices to him one moment, and the next be caused to attack that same man? It is a sobering reminder to us of the spiritual forces at work behind the scene. We fight a battle that is not solely in this realm.

In verse 20, we see that he is not dead. Although the wording is not specific, it does lead one to believe that this was a miraculous event. Had it been simply a natural healing, Paul would certainly not have been ready to travel the next day, as stated in the text.

Paul and Barnabas then return to Antioch, Lystra and Iconium to “confirm the souls of the disciples, and exhort them to continue in the faith”. In each town, they also “ordained elders”, and “through prayer and fasting commended them unto the Lord”. This seems to suggest that they both chose elders, and that the elders were commended by God for their purpose. We can only assume that these men’s duties were much the same as elders in congregations today.

After these events, they continued their travels, preaching in Attalia and Perga, and then returning to share the events with those in Antioch.