



## DEVOTIONAL

In Lystra there sat a man who was lame. He had been that way from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed and called out, “Stand up on your feet!” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

Notice the amazing way God began to open up this city. Paul and Barnabas had no idea what they were going to do. They did not form a committee and say, “Well, let’s see if we can get the Chamber of Commerce report on the city’s population distribution. Then we could divide it into squares and evangelize in a systematic way.” They had no plans other than to be there and to do what God sent them to do — to preach. So, they walked right into the market place and began, trusting the Lord to have prepared certain people, to have people of his choosing ready to open the door to the city.

As they proclaimed the gospel, that is what happened. As Paul was preaching — probably for several days in a row — sitting in the marketplace was a man who had been lame from his birth, who had never walked. He was evidently well-known throughout the city, having been there all his life. He heard what Paul said, and believed what Paul declared about the power of Jesus, the mighty Son of God. Paul looked at him and saw in that man’s eyes the faith to believe. Suddenly, unquestionably led of the Spirit, he said to him, “Stand up on your feet.” And the lame man, though he had never walked in his life, made the effort to obey. He had faith enough to try, and the moment he began to obey, the power to obey was given.

That is exactly the way the Christian life works. It does not make any difference whether the problem is physical, emotional, or spiritual; you are going to be held in its bondage until you begin to obey the Word of God about it. When you make the effort to obey, God will set you free. But He will never move until you obey. That is the way faith works. Most people are kept from seeing God at work in their lives because they keep waiting for God to do something, in order for them to believe. No, He has already done all that He is going to do in advance. When you believe what He says, then He will give you the power to be free. This miracle is a mighty parable of the many who have been spiritually lame, unable to take a step toward God, but who have been set free to do so by the gospel. It cracked the city wide open. The whole populace immediately took note of Paul and Barnabas in their midst.

Father, like the apostles, help me to trust in a living God who is changing people's hearts and delivering their minds from the grip and power of the evil one. Help me to rejoice as I, too, see the power of obedience to the Word of God in my own life.

## LIFE APPLICATION

Which comes first, faith or obedience? What is the significance of the order? Obedience to what? Faith in what — or whom? Does the union of obedience and trust describe our daily walk with God? <sup>1</sup>

## *OPEN IT*

1. Describe a time when you were duped through clever advertising into buying something that failed to live up to its claims. How did you feel?

## *READ IT*

Acts 14:1–28

## *EXPLORE IT*

2. According to verse 1–5, how were Paul and Barnabas received in Iconium?
3. Who did Paul come into contact with when he preached in Lystra?
4. Who did the Lycaonian people think Paul and Barnabas were?
5. How did Paul respond to them?
6. What kind of persecution from the Jews does Paul receive after he heals the lame man in Lystra?

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<sup>1</sup>Daily Devotion © 2014 by Ray Stedman Ministries found @ <https://www.raystedman.org/daily-devotions/acts-13to28/the-power-of-obedience>



## ICONIUM (vv. 1-7)

Ninety miles east of Pisidian Antioch, on the east-west road from Syria to Ephesus was Iconium (modern Konya, Turkey). “As usual” the apostle-ambassadors began their work at the synagogue. Luke describes their preaching as “*the word of [God’s] grace*”— the news that God loves people and has provided salvation as a free gift to those who put their faith in Jesus (Acts 14:3). Their witness was punctuated with healing miracles.

Real love is too much for some people to handle. They are more comfortable with hate. So, as usual, the good news led to division. Some believed. Some refused and poisoned the minds of others against the missionaries. An assassination plot developed. Paul and Barnabas managed to avoid the conspirators for a while, but the time came when getting out of town fast was the only sensible thing to do. On to the twin cities of Lystra and Derbe!<sup>3</sup>

**10. The gospel is all about God’s love for humanity and His unmerited favor towards the lost. What would cause anyone to reject such an offer?**

**What hope would cause people to embrace such a message?**

They spoke “*boldly for the Lord*” (Acts 14:3). The word translated “boldly” (Gk. *parrēsiasthai*) literally means “all speech.” It is used in the New Testament to describe the way in which the Holy Spirit fills the person who is speaking the Word of God either privately or publicly. There is such a sense of God’s power when they speak. There is boldness and urgency. Their message was confirmed by miraculous signs, so that a great number of both Jews and Gentiles believed. Bold proclamation of the truth of the gospel is urgently needed in our time.

We need preaching of the caliber of the Puritan Richard Baxter. The sense of urgency and boldness in preaching is caught in the lines he wrote in his poem “Love Breathing Thanks and Praise”:

*I preached as never sure to preach again, And as a dying man to dying men!*<sup>4</sup>

**11. Verse one says that Paul and Barnabas “preached in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Gentiles believed.” What was it about their preaching that moved people to listen and believe?**

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<sup>3</sup> Girard, Robert C. The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series) (Kindle Locations 3080-3087). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas, Derek W. H. Acts (Reformed Expository Commentaries) (p. 381). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

**12. What kind of preaching impacts you the most? What is it about that preaching that is so effective for your growth?**

Despite the word of grace and the confirmation of the truth by miraculous signs, they refused to believe. Their hearts were hardened, and nothing would change them. It did not matter how true it was, or how clear it was; they refused to believe. They sought out company in a (ultimately, satanic) union between (amazingly) Jews and Gentiles against the apostles. It is often the way today: folk who otherwise have nothing in common will unite in opposition against the light of the gospel. It is characteristic of unbelief that parties who ordinarily have nothing in common may unite in opposition against the truth: Pharisees and Sadducees in Jesus' day, Jews and Gentiles here in Iconium. Jews and Gentiles did not speak or eat with each other, and yet they formed an alliance of opposition against the gospel of Jesus Christ. Strange alliances of this kind against the work of God are always the work of Satan.

Those with hardened hearts begin to poison the minds of those who have begun to be drawn to the work of Christ. The enemies of the gospel begin to pour poison into the ears of those who show any interest in what the apostles are saying. Just a word will suffice, discrediting the apostles, attributing, perhaps, a false motive to their message. Whatever it was, collective animosity was raised against the apostles, forcing them to move on. The animosity was such that Paul and Barnabas were threatened with stoning: *"an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them"* (Acts 14: 5).<sup>5</sup>

**13. In what ways today do unbelievers poison people's minds against Christianity?**

**14. Paul and Barnabas fled Iconium when things became quite difficult. Was this decision one of fear or faith? When, if ever, is it right to protect oneself instead of remaining steadfast amidst great persecution?**

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

## LYSTRA (vv. 8–20)

Though little is known of the origin of Lystra, we do know it was a frontier outpost. Caesar Augustus had made it a Roman colony in 6 B.C., establishing it as the easternmost of the fortified cities of Galatia. I imagine it had a sort of “old-west” flavor and ethos. Most of the populace were uneducated Lycaonians who had their own language. The people were half-barbarous. The Romans ruled the land, the Greeks controlled the commerce, and the Jews had little influence. In fact, there was no synagogue there.

The ministry got off to a flying start in Lystra with the healing of a cripple. In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed and called out, “Stand up on your feet!” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk (vv. 8–10). As Paul preached publicly, he observed a lame man whose interest and willing gaze indicated a work of grace within. Those who preach understand what Paul experienced. Paul saw this man’s response and, following the impulse of the Holy Spirit, healed him without warning. Paul had everyone’s undivided attention as the ex-cripple (whom everyone knew) danced in front of the people and cried out, “Is it really true? I have never walked in my life before! Look, Mom — no cane!” Now Paul could give them the goods — a little on the doctrine of man, the story of the Incarnation, the atoning work of the cross, the necessity of faith. A great harvest followed!<sup>6</sup>

**15. Luke tells us that Paul saw the faith of the lame man. What might Paul have seen in this man that led him to believe he was a man of faith?**

**What are some things about you that allow a watching world to know you are a person of faith?**

Who could have anticipated such a devilish turn of events! Instead of giving glory to God for the healing of the believing lame man, the people’s appreciation turned to idolatry — a complete misunderstanding of the truth — a lie! In this case it was a lie based on fear (as most idolatry is).

A local legend held that two of the gods, Zeus and Hermes, had once assumed human form and visited the town of Lystra. Only an old man and woman offered them hospitality. The two gods became angry and destroyed the town, wiping out the entire population, except for the old couple! The Lystrans were determined not to make the same mistake again. This led to the bizarre incident with Paul and Barnabas. Religious fervor, powered by sheer terror, escalated out of control. Paul and Barnabas, not understanding the local language, did not realize at first what was happening. The priest of Zeus, whose job it was to keep the gods happy, brought bulls to sacrifice to the visiting “deities.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Hughes, R. Kent. *Acts: The Church Afire (Preaching the Word)* (Kindle Locations 3414–3429). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

<sup>7</sup> Girard, Robert C. *The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series)* (Kindle Locations 3097–3105). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

16. Paul and Barnabas teach us an important lesson. Sometimes when we are used by God, people will heap all kinds of undeserved praise and glory upon us. Why are people so prone to do things like this?

What should we do when that happens to us?

17. Paul goes from being the hero of the day to being a man who is so hated that they seek to stone him. What does this type of reversal teach us about people?

After seeing what transpires, what advice might the world have given Paul in order to dodge his impending stoning?

18. Why might God have allowed such hardships for Paul? What can hardships like this teach us?

## DERBE

Next, the church planters headed for Derbe, sixty miles southeast on the border of Galatia. The good news had good success there. From Derbe they returned for a brief visit to each place where they had left a knot of believers, a baby church. In most places, their first visit had been cut short by the pressing necessity to “get outta Dodge” quickly to keep from being killed. On these return visits the apostles did four things:

- **They strengthened the disciples** (Acts 14:22), instructing them further concerning the Christian way.
- **They encouraged them to remain true to the faith** (Acts 14:22). The little flocks of believers in each place faced the same persecution and pressure as the apostles.
- **They appointed elders in each church** (Acts 14:23). They helped believers in each place to recognize people the Holy Spirit had gifted for servant-leadership.
- **They commended them to the Lord** (Acts 14:23). The most effective leaders and committed people cannot make church happen as it is intended. The church, like the Christian life, requires a walk of faith.<sup>8</sup>

**19. Even though the road was filled with hardships and troubles along the way, Paul and Barnabas continued to do what they were called by God to do. What things has God called you to do no matter the circumstances you face this week?**

## HOME SWEET HOME

Back at “home base” in Antioch on the Orontes, the “sending church” waited and prayed for the return of their favorite sons. When Barnabas and Paul returned after two-plus years on the campaign trail, that whole wild and crazy, gung-ho-for-Jesus group came together to hear the report of what God was doing among the Gentiles. Why shouldn’t they? They had been there at every turn in the road in their hearts and prayers.<sup>9</sup>

**20. It must have been a great reward to be back with friends after their missionary journey. In what ways can our times together as Christians bring refreshment to each other’s souls and give us the needed perseverance to keep “keeping on”?**

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.