

Paul's 1st Missionary Journey comes to a conclusion - started as a result of a time of prayer, worship and fasting in the opening verses of Ch 13, spread across 6+ cities and covered ___ kilometres took longer than a year to complete

Today we are looking at the home-stretch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and then the journey back home to Antioch.

In these 28 verses, Paul + Barnabas visit 4 cities and their experiences are very different in each of them; however, there is one overarching theme that comes into focus:

The Need For Perseverance In the Face OF Hardship
_____ catchy memorable way of saying this _____

Paul and Barnabas faced very unique missionary-type hardships, but we should see these as emblematic of the hardships, trials, sufferings and challenges that we experience in our lives as well.

Iconium: 1-7

v1-2 Standard Pauline practice at this point - He goes for the low-hanging fruit. Due to his credentials as a former disciple of the famous Rabbi Gamaliel, he is permitted to be a guest speaker at the Saturday synagogue.

They would have an OT reading and then it would be his turn to comment on it, or to preach a sermon out of that week's reading... And because he (and we) know what Jesus said about the OT scriptures in Luke 24, that the Law of Moses and the Psalms and the Prophets are all pointing towards the Lord Jesus Himself - it would be fairly easy for him to show how Jesus is The Ultimate Prophet: who doesn't just speak God's Word, but is God's Word made flesh. the Ultimate and final priest,- both the Mediator and the Sacrifice The Ultimate and final King - who leads in justice, who guides our way in righteousness, and who defeats our enemies.

So after doing that Jews and Gentiles believe in Jesus - but some couldn't stand it. The gospel is strangely attractive to some and yet repulsive and offensive to others. So they began a whispering campaign, a war of words, slanderous defamatory speech... notice that it is "against the brothers" v2 The message is true, and no charge can be brought against that, so the messengers are verbally attacked. Paul and Barnabas endured attacks against their reputation.

I mentioned at the beginning that some of what we are going to read about in this chapter is uniquely apostolic, but right here at the beginning doesn't this seem just strikingly ordinary? They endured slander against their reputation. Have this ever happened to you?

Notice what they do... they were poisoning the minds of the gentiles against the brothers, SO they remained for a long time. v3 or as another translation renders it, they were personally slandered and spiritually opposed THEREFORE they stayed longer. In the midst of verbal opposition they stayed firm.

Paul has a sanctified stubbornness.

There were brand new Christians there and Paul wanted to stay there as long as possible for their sake. Iconium was proving to be an unfriendly city towards Christians so Paul wanted to make sure that the new believers were as grounded as possible, trained and disciplined.

So they stay; speaking boldly for the Lord, and God sent confirming miracles that accompanied the preaching of the Word.

We see that character assassination eventually turns into an actual assassination attempt. When news reaches Paul, he decides that now would be a good time to head to the next city.

He's brave, he perseveres in the face of hardship... but he's not suicidal. so he moves on to the next assignment.

Lystra: 8-20

Another town in the region of Galatia, this one is more rural, there is little to no Jewish population there, very much dominated by the worship of Zeus, whose temple is at the entrance of the city v13

As Paul and Barnabas enter there and begin their ministry (probably open air preaching) "He listened to Paul speaking" v9a

God uses Paul to perform a miracle, healing a life long paralytic. In verse 8 Dr Luke shows us in 3 different ways in one verse that that was the case "he couldn't use his feet" "crippled from birth" never walked" - we are supposed to know that he didn't just pull a hamstring in a recent sports injury - this guy had never walked before.

He is healed, and he leaps to his feet.

Maybe the careful hearer would have noticed that this is almost a re-enactment of a similar miracle that was performed by Peter and John on their way to the Jerusalem Temple, (Acts 3) and now we have Paul and Barnabas, far away from Jerusalem and the boundaries of Israel, being used by God to bring miraculous healing to another life-long paralytic.

Luke is making his point once again that God is not limited to the Promised Land, or the nation of Israel. He is the Lord of Heaven and Earth - and the gospel is the power of God to salvation for the Jew first, and also for the Greek.

God is not like a Wi-Fi router, and the farther you move away from a certain room in your house the weaker the connection gets... in fact, we see God at work blessing the obedience of the believers as they bring His good news from Jerusalem and Judea to Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth.

So Acts 3 is re-enacted but with different characters and a different settings, but the reaction of the crowd is surely different. in ch 3 everyone was amazed and gave glory to the the God of Israel. in Acts 14 everyone was amazed and gave glory to Zeus.

The crowd goes wild

v11-13 they speak in their native language of Lyconian, so remember that Paul and Barnabas *don't really understand what's happening.*

The crowd interprets this through their own pagan lens. They decided that these two visitors are Zeus and Hermes. As bizarre as this sounds to us, it makes a bit more sense when we realise that there was a local legend that Zeus and Hermes had once came to the city of Lystra, looking for hospitality, no one was kind to them, except for one elderly couple. Then as Z+H left the town they sent a flood and they killed everyone in the city except for the husband and wife who took them in for the night.

So now, they don't want to make the same mistake twice so they go overboard to welcome and praise the visitors. It is all in a language that they don't understand to Paul and Barnabas are a bit slow to grasp what it means and what is happening.

v14-18 once they "get it" they do all that they can to stop it!

tore their garments:

This is a traditional Jewish response to grief or specifically to blasphemy.

and of course it is Grievous any time a created thing gets the honour or love or devotion that God alone deserves.

But it is also them saying loud and clear - *we are not gods!* We are people just like you! (v15b)

Barnabas and Paul are such good examples of Christian leadership done right, and evangelism done right.

1. Christian leadership

1. they are leaders, set apart by the Holy Spirit and by the church for a special task... but they don't think of themselves too highly. They know that they are just men.
2. (this is a bit of a rant) - they don't want to be treated in a special manner, they don't expect to be elevated to this demigod type status.
 1. in some Christian circles speakers and church leaders and pastors are sometimes elevated and turned into celebrities, or super-heroes. Hopefully Calvary Cork is forever immune from that. I hope that in years to come there is always an explicit understanding that we are all brothers and sisters,

2. equally lost, yet equally found, and equally loved. We are all brothers and sisters in Christ. And the different parts of the Body play different roles, and each and every part / member is to be valued appreciated and treasured.
 3. So if any pastor, Coram Deo group leader, worship leader, reverend, minister, deacon, bishop etc ever begins to expect special treatment - may they be challenged by this reminder - the torn robes, and the loud cries "We are just men like you!"
2. evangelism
1. While P+B are church leaders, at this part of the story they are doing the work of evangelists - seeking to win unbelievers to Christ
 2. How important it is for us as we seek to communicate the good news of Jesus to our friends, peers, and fellow Cork-onians that we do with torn robes.
 3. If we give the impression to the outside world that we have everything together, that is a) untrue b) unfair.
 4. An expectation that Christians have their lives perfectly sorted out either causes the rest of us to despair when we are reminded that we don't have perfect lives - or possibly worse - it will cause us to pretend. Thereby perpetuating the vicious cycle of pretend perfect Christians and the rest of us faking it and trying to catch up.
 5. Jesus is a real saviour for real sinners. Not theoretical sins, but actual sins. Not hypothetical sinners, but real life, messy complicated men and women, who are wonderfully saved, and now are engaged in the lifelong process of sanctification and discipleship.
3. So may we lead and may invite with **torn robes**.

v15 turn from these useless things
pointing to the oxen, the altar, the priests
To the living God -
repentance and belief. Repentance is turning from, belief is turning to God.
You need to turn from your useless things. Charge them, invite them to do the same thing.

in pagan Lystra he doesn't start off with a reference to Abraham and the exodus, but he speaks of the God who made the earth and the sea and all that is in them.

Like the hymn Great is Thy Faithfulness
Summer and Winter and Springtime and Harvest
Sun moon and stars in their courses above
That testifies to God's faithfulness, and so Paul connects to them on that level.

He started by talking about creation, and then moved to the Creator. **He made it clear that there is but one God who is the Living God, the Giving God, and the Forgiving God.**

v18 with these things they could scarcely restrain the people from offering sacrifices to them. they were so intent that they could barely be talked out of it.

v19

Antioch is 100 miles , Iconium is about 20 miles. Long commute.
So, these Jews were so offended by the gospel that they traveled up to 161 Km (Antioch) to stone Paul.
They persuaded the multitudes to turn against Paul.
They previously lauded him and then they wanted him dead.

One is amazed at the fickleness of the crowd. one day they tried to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas as if they were gods, while soon after they join in the stoning of Paul as if he was a felon. Yet Luke has recorded similar of the Jerusalem crowd who with loud voices first acclaimed Jesus and then demanded His execution. (Luke 19 / 23)

"So this is what it feels like to be stoned to death" - remembering Stephen. Perhaps praying a Stephen - like prayer.

crumples to the ground and they stop the attack and go back to the city.

Disciples got around him and were probably praying for him. he wasn't necessarily dead, but he looked dead. the stoners thought that the ston-ee was dead. maybe he was, and God raised him from the dead, or maybe he was beat nearly to death and then he pulled himself up and got on with it.

2 Cor 4:9 we are struck down but not destroyed...

While George Whitfield (1757) was preaching to a large crowd in Oxmantown Green (Smithfield Dublin) and trusting in the soldiers who were there to protect him, he was nonetheless confronted by "hundreds and hundreds of papists." They took umbrage with his admonition to Honour the King and prayer for the success of the king of Prussia. **He was showered with stones until he was covered in blood, receiving many "blows and wounds." Finally he managed to stagger into a minister's house with the mob close at hand; he was picked up by a coach that fled through the town and brought him to a surgeon who treated his wounds, allowing him to preach again, which he did for three weeks.**

The Need For Perseverance In the Face OF Hardship

v20 Rose up and went into the city. He is not going to leave because of them. He leaves on his own terms.

Paul, surely bloody and bruised from the stoning he had just endured, surrounded by believers, some of whom had only just believed, got up and went back into the city. that is resolve! others would have quit, limped away from the city, never to come back again. He goes there for one more night, and then comes back again in v21

But the NEXT DAY they went on to **Derbe**...

This is at least a 60 mile walk over mountains and planes.

Paul's battered body, but they do not air lift him out of there, or take the most direct route home... they continue on.

As we will see, not only do they keep going to Derbe, but they will take the long way home to stop by the churches they planted to encourage them.

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v21 they preached to that city and made many disciples making disciples =- that is the point of christianity.

The initial decision to follow Jesus is the initial decision, the first of many. We continue following Jesus for the rest of our lives. Are you a disciple. Are you interesting in following Jesus for the rest of your life. There should be some sort of progressing in the Christian life.

v22 they strengthen the disciples , encouraging them to continue in the faith, saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

the recently battered Paul is definitely an example of this.

we need souls strengthened

we need to hear that we should continue in the faith

we need to be reminded that tribulations are part of our journey towards / in the kingdom of God

continuance (perseverance) is a proof of true faith in Jesus

"So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31-32, ESV)

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42, ESV)

home journey:

retracing their steps revisiting (in spite of the danger) the same 3 Galatian cities which they had evangelised on their outward journey, Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch v21. It was a ministry of Strengthening and Encouraging.

many hardships, cf “my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,” (2 Timothy 3:11–12, ESV)

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v23 appointed elders in every church

they visited the churches that they started and appointed elders. these churches are a few weeks old. This is not ideal - but Paul says it is better to have them than no one at all. At the end though, they commend them to the Lord. This wasn't necessarily a vote of confidence in these elders, it was committing to trusting God.

27-28 imagine the rapt attention that the church members would have had as paul told about their stories - ship travel and wizards; government officials coming to faith, crowds, mobs, stoning, conversions, baptisms, hearings.

you have new brothers and sisters in lystra, iconium, pisidian antioch.

during his extended home stay Paul wrote the book of Galatians to those churches