

34b ACTS

We pick up our study now in Acts chapter 14 verse 21, talking about Paul and Barnabas. After Paul being stoned and left for dead at Lystra, he raises up, he stands again on Anastasis, on Istami, and goes back into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

They preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples. They returned to Lystra, they returned to Iconium, they returned to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith. The main idea that strikes me at least in the telling of this story of the stoning of Paul at Lystra is where the Bible account puts the emphasis.

There is great influence, there is great opposition, there are powerful enemies that Paul has made who hate him enough and oppose him enough to actually dog his steps and follow him to Lystra and incite the crowd, cause the crowd to go from idolizing him, literally, to stoning him. Let me give you just a couple of the references for *patho*, which is what these Jews succeed in doing with the crowd. They get the crowd to make an issue of them and their credibility.

In Philippians 1.14, this very same word that says they persuaded the crowd or convinced the crowd, *patho* is used in Philippians 1.14 where Paul is talking about the fact that most of the brethren trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear. Well, when it says most of the brethren trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, that's *patho*. They have been caused to trust.

They have assigned credibility to the Lord. This is not just trust in the sense of *pistou*, like placing trust in the word of God. This is assigning credibility to God, being persuaded that God is who he says he is and will do what he says he will do because the Roman Empire cannot stop the Apostle Paul even when they imprison him.

And so this is a particular kind of trust. It is trust based on who and what the person is or appears to be. You have a similar idea in Philemon chapter 21.

You remember the story of Philemon where you've got the runaway slave and Paul is writing a letter to his former owner saying he's become a Christian. We're all brothers in Christ. Please take him back and don't punish him.

He says, Paul writes to him and says, having confidence in your obedience, I write to you since I know that you will do even more than what I say, than what I ask. He says, I have confidence in your obedience. I trust in your obedience, but this is *patho*.

I am convinced, I am persuaded that you will not only do what I ask, but much more. And

this is because Paul knows Philemon and that when he sends Onesimus back to him, Philemon the master will not only be kind to him, but will accept him as sort of an adopted son. And Paul says, I have confidence.

I am persuaded. But hopefully you kind of get the gist. And I think that's very important.

I think the Bible purposely, I think the Holy Spirit purposely does not place an emphasis on the agonizing circumstances and the physicality of Paul's stoning, but rather talks about how this crowd is so quickly swayed from one opinion to another and the reason they are blind to the message of Paul. Why are they unable to see the truth? Because they are caught up in personalities. And when we find ourselves caught up in personalities, we're going to miss the truth.

Another way of saying this is to go back and remember our categories of subjectivity. You can't be objective when you have your eyes on people. And these people in Lystra, this crowd and the Jews who persuade them are all caught up in personalities, not in truth.

We have to separate in our minds. And sometimes it takes a conscious effort to separate. Sometimes people can be very well-meaning.

Sometimes they can have been a great helper, a great source of comfort and encouragement in the past. But you cannot assume that because you have a certain level of regard for the person, that their message automatically must have that same weight. God is teaching us and encouraging us to discern and to tell the difference between the person and the message.

This is true of pastors. Pastors, in my observation, can start out all on fire and be deeply in the Word of God. And like anyone else, can get their attention distracted, can get their priorities mixed, and can begin to drift away from faithfulness to the teaching of the Word of God.

And I don't think that it's impossible for that to happen to me. It's one of the things that I have a healthy sort of worry about because I have seen it happen over and over to men I would consider to be better scholars and better pastors than me. But there can be a drift.

There can be a loss of focus and a loss of emphasis and a loss of faithfulness. And it's important for believers who choose to learn under the ministry of any particular pastor or any particular teacher to always focus on the message. It is all about the truth.

If you begin to make an assumption about the messenger and anything the messenger says is good to go, well what if the messenger slips? Like all human beings, what if there is a malfunction or an error or a goof of some sort? Well you don't want to be carried off like Jonestown or whatever. So we don't want to fall into the patho kind of confidence

that has its roots and its basis. A lot of us have a background where there is sort of a vocabulary where people develop it.

They say, well so-and-so is my... In the same way that there is a right woman for a man and there is a right man for a woman, God has sort of designated the husband that a person should have, well God does the same thing with pastors. And there is a whole slice of Christianity that decides, well here this individual, in the same way that God has designated a spouse for me, God has designated a pastor for me and that guy is it. He's my right pastor or my right pastor teacher, as they say.

And there's nothing intrinsically wrong with that as long as it doesn't develop into a patho kind of dependency where you stop analyzing what is being taught and begin to assume that because the person is presenting it, it must be right. And there are people that the authoritative nature of what they're hearing in their mind is because that person said it, not because it's biblical. That's what the problem is in Lystra.

They are all over the person saying the words and that's why patho is used. These Jews that come into town, these are the big wigs, these are the influential citizens, these are the celebrities of the region. And they say, oh Rabbi so-and-so has come all the way over to talk to us from Antioch.

The bishop of Antioch has come over. In later days the Catholic Church has a big-time bishop in both Antiochs. Antioch of Pisidia and Antioch that's over closer to Israel.

And just the fact that he's there, everybody oohs and aahs, well we don't have time to mess with that kind of thing. We have to be sure that we are getting the truth of God because that's the only place where there is power. The second thing we want to take a look at here is the message because even the experience that Paul has in being stoned in Lystra is, it's a funny thing, this particular passage was used as an example by someone who was talking about dynamic equivalency in translations and how important it is to be sensitive to culture and to language shifts, basically justifying why there have been so many new English translations.

And they use this particular passage in the slang sense of what it means to be stoned. And they said, you know, you want to be careful about saying, well Paul got stoned in Lystra, because to a modern audience who doesn't know a lot about the Bible, they have a completely different idea of what that means. You know, Paul had a big party in Lystra, is of course not what the Bible is trying to say.

But what does Paul say about this experience? He redirects their attention. Of course the news of this is going to spread throughout the region like wildfire. The disciples who surround him and then see him stand back up to seemingly and probably literally out of the dead, it wouldn't surprise me a bit that he was actually killed and God resuscitates him just like he did Lazarus and many others here.

I think there's no accident that anastasis is used. But they preached the gospel, they made many disciples, which by the way is what God told the apostles to do, isn't it? What does Matthew 28, 19 say? What people call the Great Commission. As you go, make disciples of all nations.

They preach the gospel, they make disciples. It doesn't say they made converts. It doesn't say they got a lot of people to walk the aisle.

They made disciples. Disciples are ones who follow, ones who emulate, ones who adopt a pattern of life. This is an ongoing kind of change.

They returned, strengthening the souls of the disciples. They made the disciples and then they went back through and strengthened their souls. I think the measure of any good evangelistic effort or any good missionary effort is where is the strengthening of souls that follows the making of disciples.

Is a ministry just swooping in for a week or a weekend and preaching the gospel and having a big altar call, handing out some tracts and then flying back home? Or is there some sort of ongoing support for the making and the strengthening of disciples? This is the model for going into a new place with the gospel. You preach the gospel, you stay in the region, you return and you strengthen the souls of the disciples that you have made. There needs to be some form of ministry.

There needs to hopefully be some planting of an indigenous support mechanism. There ought to be pastors and teachers rising up in the local community who will sustain the feeding of the flock, the teaching of the word of God to those disciples. That's the way you strengthen souls.

That's what Paul and Barnabas do. Exhorting them to continue in the faith and saying, we must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God. Mark chapter 10 and verse 30, Jesus is answering a question posed by the disciples.

You remember the episode of the rich young ruler who comes? He says, I've kept all the commandments from my youth. Jesus says, go sell all you have and give it to the poor and come follow me. The man goes away sorrowing because he had great possessions.

Then Jesus says, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Too much to lose, too much invested in this life, too much subjectivity, eyes on things. So the disciples are astonished.

This is Mark 10.26. And they said to him, well, who then can be delivered? In other words, who's going to be able to enter the kingdom? Because they've always assumed that the rich were the ones favored by God. Looking at them, Jesus said, with people it is impossible, but not with God, for all things are possible with God. Peter began to say to him, see, we have left all and followed you.

So Jesus answered and said, assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or property for my sake and the gospels who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time. He's talking about the time of the kingdom, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions and in the age to come eternal life. This is a fascinating statement that the Lord makes.

Those who leave these things, relationships, close family relationships, sometimes the faith that we develop in God puts distance between us and family. It has happened to a lot of us and will continue to happen as long as we're in this life. And we end up having to, we have to make a choice.

It's either pursue my relationship with God and get crossways with my family or they get crossways with me, or I abandon my progress with God and try to keep some sort of reconciliation with my family. You can't always have it both ways. Jesus says, if you wind up leaving your household, your brothers and sisters, your father and mother or your wife and children or your property, your lands for my sake and the gospels, people who do that, there's none of them who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time.

What is this time? It's the time of the kingdom. Jesus is in the process of presenting the kingdom to Israel. He says the kingdom is at hand.

Now is the appointed time. Now is the day of deliverance with persecutions. You receive a hundredfold with persecutions.

You say, well, now, wait a minute. I thought this is all the good stuff that you're going to get back. So is everyone as confused as I am in just reading this? You've left all these things.

You'll receive a hundredfold now in this time. Houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, lands with persecutions. And in the age to come, eternal life.

What is the age to come? Well, if you're already receiving a hundredfold in this time, what's he talking about? Can you have a hundredfold mothers and fathers? Can you have a hundredfold brothers and sisters? I mean, how big is your family going to get in the literal sense? What's he talking about? You leave those things in the literal world, but the satisfaction that you look for in those things, the happiness that people hope for, whether it's in their wife and children or their brothers and sisters or their mother and father or in their possessions, their lands, their property. Why do people want those things? It's because of the sense of fulfillment. I mean, it's universal that people talk about the fulfillment that they find when they start having a family, have their children and the actresses that were all this, that and the other.

I mean, you can name almost anyone and when you see them interviewed after they've

had their first child, they say, I never knew what it was like until I had my own child, the depth of it and the enjoyment that comes from it. People look at that. Well, it isn't just having a little tiny prototype human being running around.

It is what you receive in that relationship. It is the fulfillment and the enjoyment. And Jesus says, if you wind up having to leave those for my sake or for the Gospels, you will receive back a hundredfold in the sense of fulfillment, in the sense of that which you were expecting or would have had in those had they not had to be sacrificed on the altar of your spiritual life and in the age to come eternal life.

So now, we many, many times, how many times have we seen this term eternal life? And we have come to realize that this is not a synonym for salvation from the lake of fire. How could you possibly believe that eternal life means I'm not going to hell? And Jesus says that it is a possession that you receive as a result of being willing to abandon your family and your land if necessary for the sake of Christ and the Gospel. So, you're automatically saved if you have to leave your home.

That's the only way you can make this work if you see eternal life as always meaning lake of fire type salvation. This is eternal life in the sense of quality. This is inheritance and reward in the kingdom and beyond.

So, those who wind up seemingly being shorted, the Apostle Paul is going to say later on, do I not have the right to lead about a wife as Peter and the other Apostles do? Do I not have the right to be sustained by your gifts and so on? But I don't. He says I don't exercise that right because I don't want anything to interfere with accomplishing my ministry of the Gospel, my edification of the churches, my function as an Apostle. Even though I have the right, I don't exercise it.

Jesus says when you wind up doing that, you're going to receive a hundredfold in terms of peace and joy and happiness and fulfillment. People get one measure of that when their household and their land and all that is intact. God says if I call you to a path in life where some of that goes away, I will restore it to you a hundredfold in other ways.

Because obviously, who's going to have a hundredfold mothers in any sense of the word? He's talking about the fulfillment and the satisfaction that comes from that. A hundredfold now in this time and persecutions. Along with your persecutions will come this satisfaction.

What does the Apostle Paul say? I have learned in whatever state I find myself therewith to be content. Whether I am abased, whether I abound, I have this peace that passes understanding. And in the age to come, I have this hope of inheritance, this hope of even greater blessing and reward in the age to come.

But it comes through persecutions. It comes through sacrifice. In the same way, you

have the statement that the Lord makes in John chapter 15.

John chapter 15 and verse 18. If the world hates you, you know that it hated me first. This is not hatred because you're a hateful person.

Or a person deserving of hate. Because you go around making yourself a stench in the nostrils of people. This is hatred because you are like Christ.

And the world hated Christ and they hate us for the same reason. Because of Christ formed in us. Christ reflected in us.

And then down in verse 20, it says, remember the word that I said to you, a slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. John 16.33. These things I have spoken to you so that in me you may have peace.

In the world you have tribulation. But be of good cheer. Take courage.

I have overcome the world. Back in Acts chapter 9 verse 16, the calling of Paul and what God tells Cornelius ahead of time. I will show Paul, I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake.

Paul says over in 1 Thessalonians chapter 3 and verse 3, no one should be disturbed by my afflictions. For you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. It shouldn't be unexpected.

It shouldn't be shocking. It shouldn't surprise us. It's a part of God's plan for us.

I've already pointed out 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 12, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Peter has something to say about this over in 1 Peter chapter 2. You have been called for this purpose. Since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in his steps.

It is a paradox because if you tell somebody well you're going to have to suffer. I mean, if you go to the doctor and he says well you need this procedure. You go to the dentist and he says I've got to do this work on you.

Our initial feeling is well I don't want pain. I don't want to suffer. Very few people, unless they're mentally twisted, volunteer for suffering.

I mean people just have a natural disinclination to suffer. And so when the Bible starts telling us well you are certainly destined for tribulation and suffering, we say well wait a minute. Maybe this is not such a good deal after all.

But there is a great paradox because our suffering is not really suffering. And that's why Jesus said you're going to have a hundredfold satisfaction along with your measure of tribulation. Your tribulation isn't going to feel like tribulation.

Your suffering isn't going to feel like suffering. It's kind of like the work that is involved in raising a tiny child, taking care of an infant. A single guy contemplating changing diapers and chasing around trying to get it fed and wondering why it's crying and the spitting up and all of the high maintenance that's involved with it.

I mean a single guy is horrified by that. And when I was single I didn't even want to sit in a restaurant when there were little infants in there because the screaming just drove me nuts. Their little high pitched voices was just highly irritating.

And I was very resentful of people who would drag these little screaming bundles of spit and slobber and noise into a public place and just make misery everywhere they went with these little things. But it is a paradoxical thing because when you are the father and the little bundle of screaming spit and stench and so on is yours, it's not suffering. It isn't a burden.

There is a joy and a satisfaction that comes from having your own child. And it was astonishing to me. I was stunned to find that I didn't mind changing diapers.

I actually kind of liked it because I was caring for my little child. And that's about as much care as anyone is ever going to need. And you're there doing that for someone you love.

And so this thing that in the abstract and in anticipation seems to be just a horrible job isn't that way when you actually get into it. And you say, well, gee, what was I dreading? What was I so worried about? I used to dread having to do the dishes when I was a little boy, five or six years old, big table full of dishes. And I was the oldest.

All my little toddler siblings were useless. And so here's this big stack of dishes. And mom said, well, Sam, why don't you come help me do the dishes? And I thought, oh, no.

But I was constantly amazed by this because I would get my little wooden stool and stand up there next to my mother and start rinsing the dishes. And I found that it was fun. I liked working with my mom.

And she would talk to me. And I thought, why was I dreading this so much? What was I afraid of? This isn't bad. It was the anticipation that it was going to be some sort of odious job.

And the same is true here. When the Bible predicts tribulation and suffering for us, and we look at it in anticipation, we think, well, wait a minute. I don't know if I really want to do that.

But as a believer, when we find ourselves challenged, when we find ourselves in the plan of God and we realize that God is with us and His grace and His mercy are being manifest, and we experience the love of God in sustaining us in and through our trials,

we say, you know, it's worth it. I would never have been drawn this close to God. I would never have had the experience of His mercy.

I never have understood His love in the way that I do from this perspective. And you find over and over again that people say, I wouldn't trade that experience. I wouldn't trade that hardship.

I wouldn't change the plan of God for my life because God knew what He was doing. And it's like the old song says, it will be worth it all. And we have a hard time believing that in anticipation, but when we're in the midst, we find that there really is peace, there really is strength, there really is comfort and joy.

And Jesus says, you're going to have a hundredfold experience of satisfaction and joy in your Tribulation, with your Tribulation. And in the age to come, your added bonus is, you've got the inheritance. You've got something that eye has not seen, ear has not heard, neither has entered into the heart of man, the things that God has prepared for those who love Him.

We get such a great benefit in this life, coming to know God and growing in grace and knowledge of the Savior through our challenges and through our Tribulations. And we don't even know how great the best that is yet to come is going to be. And so it should not be something we dread.

It shouldn't be something we fear. Like David says in Psalm 23, even if I'm walking through the valley of the shadow of death, I'm not afraid of evil, because God's with me. His rod and His staff comfort me.

He feeds me, sets up a big table right in the presence of my enemies. He anoints my head with oil. Here I am sitting at the table with my enemies surrounding me, throwing Tribulation at me, throwing suffering at me, and in the midst of that, I'm partaking of a banquet, and God is anointing my head with oil.

What is anointing mean? It's not just a warm, pleasurable experience of olive oil running past your ears. What is anointing your head with oil? This is the experience of Christ. He's the Mashiach, the Anointed One.

Anointing with oil means God is preparing you for a future service, a future position, a future opportunity. Anointing always looks ahead to something. When David is anointed, he's going to be the king.

When Saul is anointed, he's going to be the great prince leader of Israel. David says, he anoints my head with oil, and my cup runs over. He's still sitting at the table in the presence of his enemies, and his cup runs over.

He says, you know what? This goodness and mercy are going to follow me all the days of

my life, and beyond that, I'm going to be dwelling in the house of the Lord ad infinitum, unto the ages, forever. How can it get any better than that? Do we really care about being in the presence of our enemies? We shouldn't, but we have to look at situations like we're given here in Acts. What I find fascinating is, here is the Apostle Paul, a very important man, got a lot yet to do in God's plan.

He's in the very early phase, the first missionary journey, early phase of his ministry. Peter, when he was locked up and chained between the guards, God sent an angel in the middle of the night, busted him out, sprung him, took him a block away, and turned him loose. The Apostle Paul is surrounded by this whipped up crowd, whipped into a frenzy and a froth by these Jews from Antioch and Iconium.

No angel shows up, no legion comes down and puts a perimeter around Paul. He gets beat up and stoned and left for dead, dragged out of the city like garbage. And you say, well, why didn't God protect him from that? He's got a future.

He's got a destiny. Why didn't God demonstrate his power and just make him bulletproof and rock-proof, and nobody can touch him? Why isn't it like Jesus at the cliff in Nazareth, where he just walks through the crowd and nobody can touch him? Paul goes through the entire experience of being stoned. And when you go through the list of his sufferings, he's going to receive the forty lashes minus one three times, he's going to be shipwrecked, he's going to be in prison.

He's going to suffer all kinds of abuse. And God doesn't deliver him out of it, God delivers him through it. Why? Why didn't God put a plexiglass shield around him so that nothing could touch him during his ministry? One of the reasons is, Paul says, I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

I don't want to hear any guff from anybody telling me that I don't know what I'm talking about when I tell you that God will preserve you in suffering. That it is through persecutions and tribulations that we go into the kingdom and that we inherit. Somebody could say, well, what do you know about it? You've never suffered.

God put a bulletproof shield around you. People say this kind of thing. Well, you don't know what suffering is.

How can you be a legitimate messenger of God's truth when you don't even know what you're talking about? Well, all they have to do is take one look at Paul. He's got the rock gashes. He's got the leaking eyes.

He's got the marks in his body. There was a good question on the break about whether, if he was killed and if he was resuscitated on this occasion, did God heal all of the wounds? I think probably not, because he says, I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. And I think every scar stayed, even the Lord Jesus when he was resurrected, had

the marks of his suffering in his side and in his hands.

Probably elsewhere. So, I say all of that to say this. We have a natural disinclination to suffering.

But in the physical realm, we're willing to go through it when we know there's a beneficial result. We get our teeth drilled because we know the outcome is going to be good, even if it should in some cases be uncomfortable. We let people take out our infected appendix.

We let them slice us open and go in there and dig around and we do the recuperation because we see past it to the beneficial result. And looking back, we say, well, I certainly wouldn't avoid that operation. I certainly wouldn't avoid that repair.

It wasn't necessarily pleasant, but it was worth it. And a thousand times, a million times over, we're going to look back and realize that it was worth it. That God carefully designed our tribulations and our sufferings, our challenges, for good and for benefit.

And it's nothing to dread. It is nothing to fear. Even in the valley of the shadow, I will fear no evil.

I look past that. I look through the valley to the kingdom. I look to the inheritance.

I look to the hundredfold rewards of eternal life that God has promised to those who love him. And it's all a matter of faith. You get back to that idea of pathos.

Who is the legitimate object of that kind of trust? God. We can trust God because of the person he is. When he makes a promise like that, we can put our confidence in it.

We can be persuaded by it because of who and what God is and his demonstrated faithfulness. Well, next time when we come back to Acts chapter 14, we're going to see the remainder of this first missionary journey as they leave this area of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe and start heading back, revisiting some of the places that they've been, and see the reception that they get from the church that sent them forth, and the rest and refreshment that they're going to enjoy. And then we'll move on into chapter 15.

But let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the clear instruction, the clear illustration that you give us in your word of the truths that are most important as we live from day to day and hour to hour. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will impress these truths on our hearts in such a way that we can objectively evaluate our lives, we can objectively discern where the truth is, what a right and balanced perspective is on our particular set of circumstances, and we can think and decide and live in a way that is pleasing in your sight and that reflects the glory of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray it in his name. Amen.