

Text— Acts 14:8-23

Fellow redeemed sinners, redeemed by the blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,

There are so-called ‘prosperity preachers’ who say that true Christians will never have any problems in this life, but will rather have worldly-wealth and perfect physical health, if they have strong enough faith to make it happen.

Nevertheless, in Luke 9:23 our Lord Jesus says, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” Accordingly, true Christians are to expect suffering in this world, not a life of ease, worldly-wealth and perfect physical health.

Why, during His visible sojourn on earth, Jesus Christ Himself was not rich in worldly-wealth, for He once declared, as we read in Luke 9:58, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” Hence, the so-called ‘prosperity preachers’ are dead wrong with the false doctrines they peddle, for our sermon text quite pointedly emphasizes:

“CHRISTIANS MUST THROUGH MUCH TRIBULATION ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD”

With that as our theme, may we, in view of our text and with the help of the Holy Ghost, see—

- 1) What are some pointed proofs of Christian tribulation from happenings in the life of the apostle Paul
- 2) What example the apostle Paul provides regarding a right Christian reaction to tribulation

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Prior to our Scripture selection, we learn that the apostle Paul, together with the Christian missionary named Barnabas, preached the Gospel of Christ in Iconium, a town in the region of Lycaonia, which is part of what is known today as Turkey. We read in Acts 14:1-7, concerning Paul

and Barnabas, “And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: And there they preached the gospel.”

Thus, Paul and Barnabas were persecuted because they preached the Gospel of Christ in Iconium; so, they went to the city of Lystra and preached there also, where the incidents reported in our sermon text took place, which we will presently consider.

Verses 8-10, ----- (Acts 14:8-10)

In Lystra, Paul’s preaching of the Gospel of Christ had a positive effect on a particular individual who was crippled and could not walk from the time he was born: the man came to faith.

My friends, Romans 10:17 plainly teaches, “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Accordingly, the lame man came to faith in Jesus Christ as he was given spiritual hearing by means of God’s Word, for the apostle Paul by inspiration of God declares in Romans 1:16-17, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.”

When it became evident to the apostle Paul that the lame man had come to faith, Paul *Said with a*

loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked. Yeah, that believing man who had been lame from birth, suddenly jumped up and walked. There were no long surgeries followed by rehabilitation exercises; no, the man was instantly and fully cured.

Verses 11 & 12, -----. (Acts 14:11-12)

Sadly, most of the people did NOT take the Gospel Paul had preached to heart like the lame man had done; rather, the majority rejected the Gospel of Christ and remained in their paganism, going so far as to say in their native tongue: *The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.* The people clung to Roman superstitions as they called Barnabas the god Jupiter – which is the Greek Zeus – and Paul the god Mercury – which is the Greek Hermes – since Paul did the majority of the speaking. It's quite sad that most of the listeners had NOT really heard with their hearts what Paul and Barnabas preached. The people looked more at the messengers rather than meditating on the words of the message which was preached.

Unfortunately, many people today make the same mistake as those ancient folks did, in that they look more at the messengers rather than thinking seriously about what is preached. There are all sorts of preachers with big fancy church buildings here in America; and, multitudes love to have it so, while they do NOT pay proper attention to what is being preached by testing whether or not the messages are in full accord with God's Word— the Holy Bible.

We need to regularly pray that more folks would be like the early Christians at Berea, who, upon hearing a sermon, searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so, that is, whether the things preached were truly doctrinally and Biblically sound. (Acts 17:11)

Verses 13-17, -----. (Acts 14:13-17)

Consider the actions of the people with the pagan priest of Jupiter, for they were ready to render

sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas. Oh, when Paul and Barnabas heard what those folks wished to do, it horrified them, for neither of them had the common attitude of popes and cardinals who welcome worship from people.

Paul and Barnabas, rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

Indeed, there was no excuse for such pagan behavior from the people toward Paul and Barnabas, who never claimed to be anything other than sinful men who were called by God to preach the truth to people, that they should turn from false gods to the one, true, living God, the Creator of all things, who is patient and also sustains all people on earth.

One's own conscience and the existence of the world testifies that there is an all-powerful Creator who is God, for Romans 1:19-20 declares, "that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse."

Yes, the living God is the Triune God who provides ALL people what they need for life in this world and what they need for salvation and eternal life in heaven. The Holy Bible clearly states: "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of

men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being... For we are also his offspring. Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving... Who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains. He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry. He delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man. The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (Acts 17:24-28; Psalm 147:7-11; John 3:16-18)

Accordingly, there was no excuse for the behavior of the unconverted people toward Paul and Barnabas, for God’s Word had been preached to them; but sadly, they did NOT take GOD’S WORD to heart and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 18, ----- (Acts 14:18)

Paul and Barnabas had rent their cloths as they again cried to the people to repent, testifying to the people about the true God; but, they were barely able to hold back the crowd from practicing pagan worship toward them.

My friends, Paul and Barnabas suffered Christian tribulation when they were treated like gods by the unconverted pagan people, for it tore at Paul and Barnabas’ hearts that those folks failed to believe the Gospel preached to them. Those people blew-off God’s Word; and, that surely hurt the apostle Paul and Barnabas, who both desired

to see the Lord believed on and praised by ALL the people of Lystra.

Verses 19 & 20, ----- (Acts 14:19-20)

Think about the complete turn-around of the unconverted pagan people. First, the pagan people came to think that Paul and Barnabas were the gods Mercury and Jupiter; and consequently, they desired to worship them. Then, some Jewish trouble-makers came from Antioch and Iconium and convinced the same people to murder Paul by stoning him! Oh, the apostle Paul surely endured Christian tribulation.

Thankfully, the true God was watching over the apostle Paul, for he did NOT die from the stoning; and, there were a number of people in Lystra who did believe, for they are referred to as ‘disciples’ in our text.

Oh, the majority of the people blew-off the Word of God, but some did believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and were saved, for the Lord promises in Isaiah 55:10-11, “as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” Praise the Lord that a number of folks do positively respond to His Holy Word when it is preached.

Let us remember what are some pointed proofs of Christian tribulation from happenings in the life of the apostle Paul, those being: he was treated as a pagan god, which disappointed him and horrified him since he was a preacher of the true God and the Gospel of Christ; then, the same majority of people turned with hatred against Paul and stoned him with the intent of killing him, although the Lord graciously spared his life.

As we ponder our sermon text to its conclusion, let us see what example the apostle Paul provides regarding a right Christian reaction to tribulation.

Verses 20-22, ----. (Acts 14:20-22)

Most of the people at Lystra had turned against the apostle Paul with such hatred that they stoned him, in an attempt to kill him. However, Paul did NOT quit the ministry. Rather, the apostle Paul's right Christian reaction to tribulation was that *he departed with Barnabas to Derbe, another city in the region.*

Then, what did Paul and Barnabas do upon arriving in Derbe? Did they hide and retire from preaching God's truth? No, for *when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*

Note well that Paul and Barnabas again PREACHED THE GOSPEL, the good news of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for Acts 4:12 informs us, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Indeed, without Jesus Christ, ALL those pagan peoples would have remained in their sins and headed for hell, because it remains forever true, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." — as John 3:36 clearly states.

Thus, the example the apostle Paul provides regarding a right Christian reaction to tribulation, is that of remaining personally steadfast in the faith of Jesus Christ and being fruitful therein. Paul bravely persevered in the preaching work which the Lord called him to do.

Fellow Christians, when we endure tribulation in

this world due to the faith we have and hold in Jesus, we are NOT to give up the faith, compromise the faith, or run away and hide. Rather, we are to follow the example of the apostle Paul by continuing in the faith of Jesus Christ and being fruitful in that faith.

Oh, it's NOT by our own power that we can persevere in the true faith and be fruitful in the same, for in Philippians 2:13 we are plainly told, "it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Let us thank and praise the Lord for being with us no matter what we must endure in this life.

Notice that Paul and Barnabas did NOT hold back the fact from the converts to Christianity *that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.* That's WE – all of us Christians of all times – MUST through MUCH TRIBULATION enter into THE KINGDOM OF GOD, which is heaven itself.

Thus, NO CHRISTIAN is to look for a life of ease, pleasure, worldly-wealth and perfect physical health in this evil world. Christians are NOT to expect 1,000 years of good-times on planet earth at the visible return of Jesus, for in Matthew 25 Jesus says, "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels... And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." (Matthew 25:31-34, 41, 46)

Hence, it's a fact that Christians must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

Yes, in the Gospel according to St. John, Jesus states in no uncertain terms, “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”
(John 12:25-26; 16:33)

Verse 23, ----- (Acts 14:23)

It was through Paul and Barnabas’ preaching of the Gospel that some folks in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch came to faith in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord. Local congregations were established. So, when Paul and Barnabas *had ordained them elders* – pastors, teachers and officers – *in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.* Praise God that His Holy Word had a positive effect on some who heard it.

My friends, as we’ve pondered our sermon text, it has surely become evident that Christians must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

God grant that we tenaciously cling to Christ Jesus in heart-deep faith no matter what trials we must endure in this world. Let us daily and sincerely repent of our sins. Let us, with the help of God, hold fast to Jesus as our personal Savior and Lord. And, let us go forward striving to be fruitful in the true faith, knowing the Lord will enable us. Amen.

m.e.l.