

CHAPTER 14

We have, in this chapter, a further account of the progress of the gospel, by the ministry of Paul and Barnabas among the Gentiles; it goes on conquering and to conquer, yet meeting with opposition, as before, among the unbelieving Jews. Here is,

I. Their successful preaching of the gospel for some time at Iconium, and their being driven thence by the violence of their persecutors, both Jews and Gentiles, and forced into the neighbouring countries (v. 17).

II. Their healing a lame man at Lystra, and the profound veneration which the people conceived of them thereupon, which they had much ado to keep from running into an extreme (v. 8-18).

III. The outrage of the people against Paul, at the instigation of the Jews, the effect of which was that they stoned him, as they thought, to death; but he was wonderfully restored to life (v. 19, 20).

IV. The visit which Paul and Barnabas made to the churches which they had planted, to confirm them, and put them into order (v. 21-23).

V. They return to Antioch, whence they were sent forth; the good they did by the way, and the report they made to the church of Antioch of their expedition, and, if I may so say, of the campaign they had made (v. 24-28).

ACTS 14:17

PAUL AT ICONIUM

In these verses we have,

I. The preaching of the gospel in Iconium, whither the apostles were forced to retire from Antioch. As the blood of the martyrs has been the seed of the church, so the banishment of the confessors has helped to scatter that seed. Observe,

1. How they made the first offer of the gospel *to the Jews in their synagogues*; thither they went, not only as to a place of meeting, but as to a place of meeting with them, to whom, wherever they came, they were to apply themselves in the first place. Though the Jews at Antioch had used them barbarously, yet they did not therefore decline preaching the gospel to the Jews at Iconium, who perhaps might be better disposed. Let not those of any denomination be condemned in the gross, nor some suffer for others' faults; but let us do good to those who have done evil to us. Though *the blood-thirsty hate the upright, yet the just seek their soul* (³¹⁹⁰Proverbs 29:10), seek the salvation of it.

2. How the apostles concurred herein. Notice is taken of this, that *they went both together into the synagogue*, to testify their unanimity and mutual affection, that people might say, *See how they love one another*, and might think the better of Christianity, and that they might strengthen one another's hands and confirm one another's testimony, and *out of the mouth of two witnesses every word might be established*. They did not go one one day and another another, nor one go at the beginning and the other some time after; but they went in both together.

II. The success of their preaching there: *They so spoke that a great multitude*, some hundreds perhaps, if not thousands, *both of the Jews and also of the Greeks*, that is the Gentiles, *believed*. Observe here,

1. That the gospel was now preached to Jews and Gentiles together, and those of each denomination that believed came together into the church. In the close of the foregoing chapter it was preached first to the Jews, and some of them believed, and then to the Gentiles, and some of them believed; but here they are put together, being put upon the same level. The Jews have not so lost their preference as to be thrown behind, only the Gentiles are brought to stand upon even terms with them; *both are reconciled to God in one body* (⁴⁰²⁶Ephesians 2:16), and both together admitted into the church without distinction.

2. There seems to have been something remarkable in the manner of the apostles' preaching here, which contributed to their success: *They so spoke that a great multitude believed* so plainly, so convincingly, with such an evidence and *demonstration of the Spirit*, and *with such power*; they so spoke, so warmly, so affectionately, and with such a manifest concern for the souls of men, that one might perceive they were not only convinced,

but filled, with the things they spoke of, and that what they spoke came from the heart and therefore was likely to reach to the heart; they so spoke, so earnestly and so seriously, so boldly and courageously, that those who heard them could not but say that *God was with them of a truth*. Yet the success was not to be attributed to the manner of their preaching, but to the Spirit of God, who made use of that means.

III. The opposition that their preaching met with there, and the trouble that was created them; lest they should be puffed up with the multitude of their converts, there was given them this thorn in the flesh.

1. Unbelieving Jews were the first spring of their trouble here, as elsewhere (v. 2): they *stirred up the Gentiles*. The influence which the gospel had upon many of the Gentiles, and their embracing it, as it provoked some of the Jews to a holy jealousy and stirred them up to receive the gospel too (⁴⁶¹⁴Romans 11:14), so it provoked others of them to a wicked jealousy, and exasperated them against the gospel. Thus as good instructions, so good examples, which to some are a savour of life unto life, to others are a savour of death unto death. See ⁴⁶¹⁵2 Corinthians 2:15, 16.

2. Disaffected Gentiles, irritated by the unbelieving Jews, were likely to be the instruments of their trouble. The Jews, by false suggestions, which they were continually buzzing in the ears of the Gentiles, made *their minds evil affected against the brethren*, whom of themselves they were inclined to think favourably of. They not only took occasion in all companies, as it came in their way, but made it their business to go purposely to such as they had any acquaintance with, and said all that their wit or malice could invent to beget in them not only a mean but an ill opinion of Christianity, telling them how destructive it would certainly be to their pagan theology and worship; and, for their parts, they would rather be Gentiles than Christians. Thus they soured and embittered their spirits against both the converters and the converted. *The old serpent* did, by their poisonous tongues, infuse his venom against *the seed of the woman* into the minds of these Gentiles, and this was a *root of bitterness in them, bearing gall and wormwood*. It is no wonder if those who are ill affected towards good people wish ill to them, speak ill of them, and contrive ill against them; it is all owing to ill will. *Ekakosan*, they molested and vexed the minds of the Gentiles (so some of the critics take it); they were continually teasing

them with their impertinent solicitations. The tools of persecutors have a dog's life, set on continually.

IV. Their continuance in their work there, notwithstanding this opposition, and God's owning them in it, v. 3. We have here,

1. The apostles working for Christ, faithfully and diligently, according to the trust committed to them. Because the minds of *the Gentiles were evil affected against them*, one would think that therefore they should have withdrawn, and hastened out of the way, or, if they had preached, should have preached cautiously, for fear of giving further provocation to those who were already enough enraged. No; on the contrary, therefore *they abode there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord*. The more they perceived the spite and rancour of the town against the new converts, the more they were animated to go on in their work, and the more needful they saw it to continue among them, *to confirm them in the faith, and to comfort them. They spoke boldly*, and were not afraid of giving offence to the unbelieving Jews. What God said to the prophet, with reference to the unbelieving Jews in his day, was now made good to the apostles: *I have made thy face strong against their faces*, ~~xxxv~~ Ezekiel 3:79. But observe what it was that animated them: *They spoke boldly in the Lord*, in his strength, and trusting in him to bear them out; not depending upon any thing in themselves. *They were strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*.

2. Christ working with the apostles, according to his promise, *Lo, I am with you always*. When they went on in his name and strength, he failed not to give testimony to the word of his grace. Note,

(1.) The gospel is a word of grace, the assurance of God's good will to us and the means of his good work in us. It is the word of Christ's grace, for it is in him alone that we find favour with God.

(2.) Christ himself has attested this word of grace, who is *the Amen, the faithful witness*; he has assured us that it is the word of God, and that we may venture our souls upon it. As it was said in general concerning the first preachers of the gospel that they had *the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by signs following* (~~xliv~~ Mark 16:20), so it is said particularly concerning the apostles here *that the Lord confirmed their testimony, in granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands* in the miracles they wrought in the kingdom of nature as well as the wonders

done by their word, in the greater miracles wrought on men's minds by the power of divine grace. The Lord was with them, while they were with him, and abundance of good was done.

V. The division which this occasioned in the city (v. 4): *The multitude of the city was divided* into two parties, and both active and vigorous. Among the rulers and persons of rank, and among the common people, there were some that held with the unbelieving Jews, and others that held with the apostles. Barnabas is here reckoned an apostle, though not one of the twelve, nor called in the extra-ordinary manner that Paul was, because set apart by special designation of *the Holy Ghost to the service of the Gentiles*. It seems, this business of the preaching of the gospel was so universally taken notice of with concern that every person, even of *the multitude of the city*, was either for it or against it; none stood neuter. "Either for us or for our adversaries, for God or Baal, for Christ or Beelzebub."

1. We may here see the meaning of Christ's prediction that he *came not to send peace upon earth, but rather division*, ~~see~~ Luke 12:51-53. If all would have given in unanimously into his measures, there would have been universal concord; and, could men have agreed in this, there would have been no dangerous discord nor disagreement in other things; but, disagreeing here, the breach was wide as the sea. Yet the apostles must not be blamed for coming to Iconium, although before they came the city was united, and now it was divided; for it is better that part of the city go to heaven than all to hell.

2. We may here take the measures of our expectations; let us not think it strange if the preaching of the gospel occasion division, nor be offended at it; it is better to be reproached and persecuted as dividers for swimming against the stream than yield ourselves to be carried down the stream that leads to destruction. Let us hold with the apostles, and not fear those that hold with the Jews.

VI. The attempt made upon the apostles by their enemies. Their evil affection against them broke out at length into violent outrages, v. 5. Observe,

1. Who the plotters were: *Both the Gentiles and the Jews, with their rulers*. The Gentiles and Jews were at enmity with one another, and yet united against Christians, like Herod and Pilate, Sadducees and Pharisees,

against Christ; and like *Gebal and Ammon and Amalek, of old*, against Israel. If the church's enemies can thus unite for its destruction, shall not its friends, laying aside all personal feuds, unite for its preservation?

2. What the plot was. Having now got *the rulers* on their side, they doubted not but to carry their point, and their design was *to use the apostles despitefully*, to expose them to disgrace, and then *to stone them*, to put them to death; and thus they hoped to sink their cause. They aimed to take away both their reputation and their life, and this was all they had to lose which men could take from them, for they had neither lands nor goods.

VII. The deliverance of the apostles out of the hands of those *wicked and unreasonable men*, v. 6, 7. They got away, upon notice given them of the design against them, or the beginning of the attempt upon them, of which they were soon aware, and they made an honourable retreat (for it was not an inglorious flight) to *Lystra and Derbe*; and there,

1. They found safety. Their persecutors in Iconium were for the present satisfied that they were thrust out of their borders, and pursued them no further. God has shelters for his people in a storm; nay, he is, and will be, himself their hiding place.

2. They found work, and this was what they went for. When the door of opportunity was shut against them at Iconium, it was opened at *Lystra and Derbe*. To these cities they went, and there, and *in the region that lieth round about, they preached the gospel*. In times of persecution ministers may see cause to quit the spot, when yet they do not quit the work.

⌄⌄⌄ ACTS 14:818

THE LAME MAN HEALED AT LYSTRA

In these verses we have,

I. A miraculous cure wrought by Paul at Lystra upon a cripple that had been lame from his birth, such a one as was miraculously cured by Peter and John, ⌄⌄⌄ Acts 3:2. That introduced the gospel among the Jews, this among the Gentiles; both that and this were designed to represent the impotency of all the children of men in spiritual things: they are lame from

their birth, till the grace of God puts strength into them; for it was when we were yet *without strength* that *Christ died for the ungodly*, ^{<486>}Romans 5:6. Observe here,

1. The deplorable case of the poor cripple (v. 8): He was *impotent in his feet, disabled* (so the word is) to such a degree that it was impossible he should set his foot to the ground, to lay any stress upon it. It was well known that he had been so *from his mother's womb*, and that he *never had walked*, nor could *stand up*. We should take occasion hence to thank God for the use of our limbs; and those who are deprived of it may observe that their case is not singular.

2. The expectation that was raised in him of a cure (v. 9): He heard Paul preach, and, it is likely, was much affected with what he heard, believed that the messengers, having their commission thence, had a divine power going along with them, and were therefore able to cure him of his lameness. This Paul was aware of, by the spirit of discerning that he had, and perhaps the aspect of his countenance did in part witness for him: *Paul perceived that he had faith to be healed*; desired it, hoped for it, had such a thing in his thoughts, which it does not appear that the lame man Peter healed had, for he expected no more than an *alms*. There *was not found such great faith in Israel* as was among the Gentiles, ^{<488>}Matthew 8:10.

3. The cure wrought: *Paul, perceiving that he had faith to be healed, brought the word and healed him*, ^{<497>}Psalms 107:20. Note, God will not disappoint the desires that are of his own kindling, nor the hopes of his own raising. Paul spoke to him *with a loud voice*, either because he was at some distance, or to show that the true miracles, wrought by the power of Christ, were far unlike the lying wonders wrought by deceivers, *that peeped, and muttered, and whispered*, ^{<289>}Isaiah 8:19. God saith, *I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth*, ^{<259>}Isaiah 45:19. Paul spoke to him with a loud voice, that the people about might take notice, and have their expectations raised of the effect. It does not appear that this cripple was a beggar; it is said (v. 8) *that he sat*, not that he sat begging. But we may imagine how melancholy it was to him to see other people walking about him, and himself disabled; and therefore how welcome Paul's word was to him, "*Stand upright on thy feet; help thyself, and God shall help thee; try whether thou hast strength, and thou shalt find that thou hast.*" Some copies read it, *I say unto thee, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,*

Stand upright on thy feet. It is certain that this is implied, and very probably was expressed, by Paul, and *power went along with this word;* for presently *he leaped and walked,* leaped up from the place where he sat, and not only *stood upright,* but to show that he was perfectly cured, and that immediately, he walked to and fro before them all. Herein the scripture was fulfilled, that when *the wilderness of the Gentile world is made to blossom as the rose then shall the lame man leap as a hart,* ²⁸¹ Isaiah 35:1, 6. Those that by the grace of God are cured of their spiritual lameness must show it by leaping with a holy exultation and walking in a holy conversation.

II. The impression which this cure made upon the people: they were amazed at it, had never seen nor heard the like, and fell into an ecstasy of wonder. Paul and Barnabas were strangers, exiles, refugees, in their country; every thing concurred to make them mean and despicable: yet the working of this one miracle was enough to make them in the eyes of this people truly great and honourable, though the multitude of Christ's miracles could not screen him from the utmost contempt among the Jews. We find here,

1. The people take them for gods (v. 11): *They lifted up their voices* with an air of triumph, saying in their own language (for it was the common people that said it), *in the speech of Lycaonia,* which was a dialect of the Greek, *The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.* They imagined that Paul and Barnabas had dropped down to them out of the clouds, and that they were some divine powers, no less than gods, though in the likeness of men. This notion of the thing agreed well enough with the pagan theology, and the fabulous account they had of the visits which their gods made to this lower world; and proud enough they were to think that they should have a visit made to them. They carried this notion so far here that they pretended to tell which of their gods they were, according to the ideas their poets had given them of the gods (v. 12): *They called Barnabas Jupiter;* for, if they will have him to be a god, it is as easy to make him the prince of their gods as not. It is probable that he was the senior, and the more portly comely man, that had something of majesty in his countenance. And *Paul they called Mercury,* who was the messenger of the gods, that was sent on their errands; for Paul, though he had not the appearance that Barnabas had, was *the chief speaker,* and had a greater command of language, and perhaps appeared to have something mercurial in his temper and genius. *Jupiter* used to take *Mercury* along with him,

they said, and, if he make a visit to their city, they will suppose he does so now.

2. The priest thereupon prepares *to do sacrifice to them*, v. 13. The temple of Jupiter was, it seems, before the gate of their city, as its protector and guardian; and the priest of that idol and temple, hearing the people cry out thus, took the hint presently, and thought it was time for him to bestir himself to do his duty: many a costly sacrifice he had offered to the image of Jupiter, but if Jupiter be among them *himselſin propria persona*, it concerns him to do him the utmost honours imaginable; and the people are ready to join with him in it. See how easily vain minds are carried away with a popular outcry. If the crowd give a shout, Here is Jupiter, the priest of Jupiter takes the first hint, and offers his service immediately. When Christ, the Son of God, came down, and appeared in the likeness of men, and did many, very many miracles, yet they were so far from doing sacrifice to him that they made him a sacrifice to their pride and malice: *He was in the world, and the world knew him not; he came to his own, and his own received him not;* but Paul and Barnabas, upon the working of one miracle, are immediately deified. The same power of the god of this world which prejudices the carnal mind against truth makes errors and mistakes to find easy admission; and both ways his turn is served. They *brought oxen*, to be sacrificed *to them, and garlands*, with which to crown the sacrifices. These garlands were made up of flowers and ribbons; and they gilded the horns of the oxen they sacrificed.

*Victimae ad supplicium saginantur,
hostiae ad poenam corenantur.*

*So beasts for sacrifice do feed,
First to be crown'd, and then to bleed.
So Octavius in Minutius Felix.*

III. Paul and Barnabas protest against this undue respect paid them, and with much ado prevent it. Many of the heathen emperors called themselves *gods*, and took a pride in having divine honours paid them: but Christ's ministers, though real benefactors to mankind, while these tyrants only pretended to be so, refused those honours when they were so tendered. Whose successor therefore he is who *sits in the temple of God*, and shows *that he is god* (^{SM16}2 Thessalonians 2:4), and who is adored as *our lord god*, the pope, it is easy to say. Observe,

1. The holy indignation which Paul and Barnabas conceived at this: *When they heard this, they rent their clothes.* We do not find that they rent their clothes when the people vilified them, and spoke of stoning them; they could bear this without disturbance: but when they deified them, and spoke of worshipping them, they could not bear it, but rent their clothes, as being more concerned for God's honour than their own.

2. The pains they took to prevent it. They did not connive at it, nor say, "If people will be deceived, let them be deceived," much less suggest to themselves and one another that it might contribute both to the safety of their persons and the success of their ministry if they suffered the people to continue in this mistake, and so they might make a good hand of an ill thing. No, God's truth needs not the service of man's lie. Christ had put honour enough upon them in making them apostles, they needed not assume either the honour of princes or the honour of gods; they appeared with much more magnificent titles when they were called *the ambassadors of Christ, and the stewards of the mysteries of God,* than when they were called Jupiter and Mercury. Let us see how they prevented it.

(1.) *They ran in among the people,* as soon as they heard of it, and would not so much as stay awhile to see what the people would do. Their running in, like servants, among the people, showed that they were far from looking upon themselves as gods, or taking state upon them; they did not stand still, expecting honours to be done them, but plainly declined them by thrusting themselves into the crowd. They ran in, as men in earnest, with as much concern as Aaron *ran in between the living and the dead,* when the plague was begun.

(2.) They reasoned with them, *crying out,* that all might hear, "Sirs, *why do you these things?*" Why do you go about to make gods of us? It is the most absurd thing you can do; for,

[1.] "Our nature will not admit it: *We also are men of like passions with you*" *homoiopatheis*: it is the same word that is used concerning Elias, ^{<178>}James 5:18, where we render it, *subject to like passions as we are.* "We are men, and therefore you wrong yourselves if you expect that from us which is to be had in God only; and you wrong God if you give that honour to us, or to any other man, which is to be given to God only. We not only have such bodies as you see, but *are of like passions with you,* have *hearts fashioned like as other men* (^{<185>}Psalm 33:15); for, *as in water face answers to face, so doth the heart of man to man,* (^{<179>}Proverbs 27:19.

We are naturally subject to the same infirmities of the human nature, and liable to the same calamities of the human life; not only men, but sinful men and suffering men, and therefore will not be deified.”

[2.] “Our doctrine is directly against it. Must we be added to the number of your gods whose business it is to abolish the gods you have? *We preach unto you that you should turn from these vanities unto the living God.* If we should suffer this, we should confirm you in that which it is our business to convert you from:” and so they take this occasion to show them how just and necessary it was that they should *turn to God from idols*, ^{<500>}1 Thessalonians 1:9. When they preached to the Jews, who hated idolatry, they had nothing to do but to preach the grace of God in Christ, and needed not, as the prophets in dealing with their fathers, to preach against idolatry: but, when they had to do with the Gentiles, they must rectify their mistakes in natural religion, and bring them off from the gross corruptions of that. See here what they preached to the Gentiles.

First, That the gods which they and their fathers worshipped, and all the ceremonies of their worship of them were *vanities*, idle things, unreasonable, unprofitable, which no rational account could be given of, nor any real advantage gained from. Idols are often called vanities in the Old Testament, ^{<632>}Deuteronomy 32:21; ^{<1103>}1 Kings 10:13; ^{<2442>}Jeremiah 14:22. *An idol is nothing in the world* (^{<4804>}1 Corinthians 8:4): it is not at all what it is pretended to be, it is a cheat, it is a counterfeit; it deceives those that trust to it and expect relief from it. Therefore *turn from these vanities*, turn from them with abhorrence and detestation, as Ephraim did (^{<3448>}Hosea 14:8): “*What have I to do any more with idols? I will never again be thus imposed upon.*”

Secondly, That the God to whom they would have them *turn* is *the living God*. They had hitherto worshipped dead images, that were utterly unable to help them (^{<2649>}Isaiah 64:9), or (as they now attempted) dying men, that would soon be disabled to help them; but now they are persuaded to worship a living God, who has life in himself, and life for us, and lives for evermore.

Thirdly, That this God is the creator of the world, the fountain of all being and power: “*He made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things therein*, even those things which you worship as gods, so that he *is the God* of your gods. You worship gods which you made, the creatures of your own fancy, and the work of your own hands. We call you to worship

the true God, and cheat not yourselves with pretenders; worship the Sovereign Lord of all, and disparage not yourselves in bowing down to his creatures and subjects.”

Fourthly, That the world owed it to his patience that he had not destroyed them long ere this for their idolatry (v. 16): *In times past*, for many ages, unto this day, he *suffered all nations to walk in their own ways*. These idolaters, that were called from the service of other gods, might think, “Have we not served these gods hitherto, and our fathers before us, time out of mind; and why may we not as well go on to serve them still?” No, your serving them was a trial of God's patience, and it was a miracle of mercy that you were not cut off for it. But, though he did not destroy you for it while you were in ignorance, and knew no better (^{<4473>}Acts 17:30) yet now that he has sent his gospel into the world, and by it has made a clear discovery of himself and his will to *all nations*, and not to the Jews only, if you still continue in your idolatry he will not bear with you as he has done. All the nations that had not the benefit of divine revelation, that is, all but the Jews, *he suffered to walk in their own ways*, for they had nothing to check them, or control them, but their own consciences, their own thoughts (^{<4185>}Romans 2:15), no scriptures, no prophets; and then they were the more excusable if they mistook their way: but now that God has sent a revelation into the world which is to be published to *all nations* the case is altered. We may understand it as a judgment upon all nations that *God suffered them to walk in their own ways, gave them up to their own hearts' lusts*; but now the time is come when *the veil of the covering spread over all nations should be taken off* (^{<2371>}Isaiah 25:7), and now you will no longer be excused in these vanities, but must turn from them. Note,

1. God's patience with us hitherto should *lead us to repentance*, and not encourage us to presume upon the continuance of it, while we continue to provoke him.
2. Our having done ill while we were in ignorance will not bear us out in doing ill when we are better taught.

Fifthly, That even when they were not under the direction and correction of the word of God, yet they might have known, and should have known, to do better by the works of God, v. 17. Though the Gentiles had not the *statutes and judgments* that the Jews had to witness for God against all pretenders, no tables of testimony or tabernacle of testimony, yet *he left not himself without witness*; besides *the witness* for God within them (the

dictates of natural conscience), they had *witnesses* for God round about them the bounty of common providence. Their having no scriptures did in part excuse them, and therefore God did not destroy them for their idolatry, as he did the Jewish nation. This however did not wholly excuse them, but that notwithstanding this they were highly criminal and deeply guilty before God; for there were other *witnesses* for God, sufficient to inform them that he and he only is to be worshipped, and that to him they owed all their services from whom they received all their comforts, and therefore that they were guilty of the highest injustice and ingratitude imaginable, in alienating them from him. God, having *not left himself without witness*, has not left us without a guide, and so has left us without excuse; for whatever is a witness for God is a witness against us, if we give that glory to any other which is due to him only.

1. The bounties of common providence witness to us that there is a God, for they are all dispensed wisely and with design. The *rain and fruitful seasons* could not come by chance, nor *are there any of the vanities of the heathen that can give rain*, neither *can the heavens of themselves give showers*, ^{<2442>}Jeremiah 14:22. All the powers of nature witness to us a sovereign power in the God of nature, from whom they are derived, and on whom they depend. It is not the heaven that gives us rain, but God that gives us rain from heaven, he is the Father of the rain, ^{<883>}Job 38:28.
2. The benefits we have by these bounties witness to us that we ought to make our acknowledgments not to the creatures who are made serviceable to us, but to the Creator who makes them so. *He left not himself without witness, in that he did good*. God seems to reckon the instances of his *goodness* to be more pregnant, cogent proofs of his title to our homage and adoration than the evidences of his *greatness*; for his goodness is his glory. *The earth is full of his goodness; his tender mercies are over all his works*; and therefore *they praise him*, ^{<459>}Psalm 145:9, 10. God does us good, in preserving to us his air to breathe in, his ground to go upon, the light of his sun to see by; but, because the most sensible instance of the goodness of Providence to each of us in particular is that of the daily provision made by it of meat and drink for us, the apostle chooses to insist upon that, and shows how God does us good,

(1.) In preparing it for us, and that by a long train of causes which depend upon him as the first cause: *The heavens hear the earth; the earth hears the corn, and wine, and oil; and they hear Jezreel.*

^{<302>}Hosea 2:21, 22. He does us good in giving us rain from heaven, rain for us to drink, for if there were no rain there would be no springs of water and we should soon die for thirst, rain for our land to drink, for our meat as well as drink we have from the rain; in giving us this, he *gives us fruitful seasons. If the heavens be as iron, the earth will soon be as brass,* ^{<339>}Leviticus 26:19. *This is the river of God which greatly enriches the earth, and by it God prepares us corn,* ^{<1361>}Psalm 65:9-13. Of all the common operations of providence, the heathen chose to form their notion of the supreme God by that which bespeaks terror, and is proper to strike an awe of him upon us, and this was *the thunder*; and therefore they called Jupiter *the thunderer*, and represented him with a thunderbolt in his hand; and it appears by ^{<1298>}Psalm 29:3 that this ought not to be overlooked; but the apostle here, to engage us to worship God, sets before us his beneficence, that we may have good thoughts of him in every thing wherein we have to do with him may love him and delight in him, as one that does good, does good to us, does good to all, in giving *rain from heaven and fruitful seasons*; and if at any time rain be withheld, or the seasons be unfruitful, we may thank ourselves; it is our sin *that turns away these good things from us* which were coming to us, and stops the current of God's favours.

(2.) In giving us the comforts of it. It is he *that fills our hearts with food and gladness. God is rich in mercy to all* (^{<502>}Romans 10:12): *he gives us richly all things to enjoy* (^{<347>}1 Timothy 6:17), is not only a benefactor, but a bountiful one, not only *gives us the things we need, but gives us to enjoy them* (^{<2024>}Ecclesiastes 2:24): *He fills our hearts with food*, that is, he gives us food to our hearts' content, or according to our hearts' desire; not merely for necessity, but plenty, dainty, and variety. Even those nations that had lost the knowledge of him, and worshipped other gods, yet he *filled their houses, filled their mouths, filled their bellies* (^{<828>}Job 22:18; ^{<1374>}Psalm 17:14) *with good things*. The Gentiles that *lived without God in the world*, yet lived upon God, which Christ urges as a reason why we should *do good to those that hate us*, ^{<4154>}Matthew 5:44, 45. Those heathen had *their hearts filled with food*; this was their felicity and satisfaction, they desired no more;

but *these things will not fill the soul* (²⁰⁷⁹Ezekiel 7:19), nor will those that know how to value their own souls be satisfied with them; but the apostles put themselves in as sharers in the divine beneficence. We must all own that God fills our hearts with food and gladness; not only *food*, that we may live, but *gladness*, that we may live cheerfully; to him we owe it that we do not *all our days eat in sorrow*. Note, We must thank God, not only for our food, but for our gladness that he gives us leave to be cheerful, cause to be cheerful, and hearts to be cheerful. And, if *our hearts be filled with food and gladness*, they ought to be filled with love and thankfulness, and enlarged in duty and obedience, (²⁸⁸⁰Deuteronomy 8:10; 28:47).

Lastly, The success of this prohibition which the apostles gave to *the people* (v. 18): By *these sayings*, with much ado, they *restrained the people from doing sacrifice to them*, so strongly were these idolaters set upon their idolatry. It was not enough for the apostles to refuse to be deified (this would be construed only a pang of modesty), but they resented it, they showed the people the evil of it, and all little enough, for they could *scarcely* restrain them from it, and some of them were ready to blame the priest, that he did not go on with his business notwithstanding. We may see here what gave rise to the pagan idolatry; it was terminating those regards in the instruments of our comfort which should have passed through them to the Author. Paul and Barnabas had cured a cripple, and therefore the people deified them, instead of glorifying God for giving them such power, which should make us very cautious that we do not give that honour to another, or take it to ourselves, which is due to God only.

◀448▶ ACTS 14:19-28

PAUL STONED AT LYSTRA

We have here a further account of the services and sufferings of Paul and Barnabas.

I. How Paul was stoned and left for dead, but miraculously came to himself again, v. 19, 20. They fell upon Paul rather than Barnabas, because Paul, being the chief speaker, galled and vexed them more than Barnabas did. Now observe here,

1. How the people were incensed against Paul; not by any injury they pretended he had done them (if they took it for an affront that he would not let them misplace divine honours upon him, when they considered themselves they would easily forgive him that wrong), but *there came certain Jews from Antioch*, hearing, it is likely, and vexed to hear, what respect was shown to Paul and Barnabas at Lystra; and they incensed the people against them, as factious, seditious, dangerous persons, not fit to be harboured. See how restless the rage of the Jews was against the gospel of Christ; they could not bear that it should have footing any where.

2. To what degree they were incensed by these barbarous Jews: they were irritated to such a degree that the mob rose and *stoned Paul*, not by a judicial sentence, but in a popular tumult; they threw stones at him, with which they knocked him down, and then *drew him out of the city*, as one not fit to live in it, or drew him out upon a sledge or in a cart, to bury him, *supposing he had been dead*. So strong is the bias of the corrupt and carnal heart to that which is evil, even in contrary extremes, that, as it is with great difficulty that men are restrained from evil on one side, so it is with great ease that they are persuaded to evil on the other side. See how fickle and mutable the minds of carnal worldly people are, that do not know and consider things. Those that but the other day would have treated the apostles as more than men now treat them as worse than brutes, as the worst of men, as the worst of male-factors. To-day *Hosanna*, to-morrow *Crucify*; to-day sacrificed to, to-morrow sacrificed. We have an instance of a change the other way, Acts 28. *This man is a murderer*, v. 4; no doubt *he is a god*, v. 6. Popular breath turns like the wind. If Paul would have been Mercury, he might have been enthroned, nay, he might have been enshrined; but, if he will be a faithful minister of Christ, he shall be stoned, and thrown out of the city. Thus those who easily submit to strong delusions hate to receive the truth in the love of it.

3. How he was delivered by the power of God: When he was *drawn out of the city, the disciples stood round about him*, v. 20. It seems there were some here at Lystra that became disciples, that found the mean between deifying the apostles and rejecting them; and even these new converts had courage to own Paul when he was thus run down, though they had reason enough to fear that the same that stoned him would stone them for owning him. They stood round about him, as a guard to him against the further outrage of the people stood about him to see whether he were alive or dead; and all of a sudden *he rose up*. Though he was not dead, yet he was

ill crushed and bruised, no doubt, and fainted away; he was in a *deliquium*, so that it was not without a miracle that he came so soon to himself, and was so well as to be able to go into the city. Note, God's faithful servants, though they may be brought within a step of death, and may be looked upon as dead both by friends and enemies, shall not die as long as he has work for them to do. They *are cast down, but not destroyed*, ~~400~~2 Corinthians 4:9.

II. How they went on with their work, notwithstanding the opposition they met with. All the stones they threw at Paul could not beat him off from his work: They *drew him out of the city* (v. 19), but, as one that set them at defiance, he *came into the city* again, to show that he did not fear them; *none even of these things move him*. However, their being persecuted here is a known indication to them to seek for opportunities of usefulness elsewhere, and therefore for the present they quit Lystra.

1. They went to break up and sow fresh ground at *Derbe*. Thither the next day *Paul and Barnabas departed*, a city not far off; there they preached the gospel, there they *taught many*, v. 21. And it should seem that Timothy was of that city, and was one of the disciples that now attended Paul, had met him at Antioch and accompanied him in all this circuit; for, with reference to this story, Paul tells him how fully *he had known the afflictions he endured at Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra*, ~~380~~2 Timothy 3:10, 11. Nothing is recorded that happened at Derbe.

2. They returned, and went over their work again, watering what they had sown; and, having staid as long as they thought fit at Derbe, they came back to Lystra, to Iconium, and Antioch, the cities where they had preached, v. 21. Now, as we have had a very instructive account of the methods they took in laying the foundation, and beginning the good work, so here we have the like of their building upon that foundation, and carrying on that good work. Let us see what they did,

(1.) They *confirmed the souls of the disciples*; that is, they inculcated that upon them which was proper to confirm them, v. 22. Young converts are apt to waver, and a little thing shocks them. Their old acquaintances beg they will not leave them. Those that they look upon to be wiser than themselves set before them the absurdity, indecency, and danger, of a change. They were allured, by the prospect of preferment, to stick to the traditions of their fathers; they are frightened with the danger of swimming

against the stream. All this tempts them to think of making a retreat in time; but the apostles come and tell them that *this is the true grace of God wherein they stand*, and therefore they must stand to it that there is no danger like that of losing their part in Christ, no advantage like that of keeping their hold of him; that, whatever their trials may be, they shall have strength from Christ to pass through them; and, whatever their losses may be, they shall be abundantly recompensed. And this *confirms the souls of the disciples*; it fortifies their pious resolutions, in the strength of Christ, to adhere to Christ whatever it may cost them. Note,

[1.] Those that are converted need to be confirmed; those that are planted need to be rooted. Ministers' work is to establish saints as well as to awaken sinners. *Non minor est virtus quam quorere parta tueri. To retain is sometimes as difficult as to acquire.* Those that were instructed in the truth must know the certainty of the things in which they have been instructed; and those that are resolved must be fixed in their resolutions.

[2.] True confirmation is confirmation of the soul; it is not binding the body by severe penalties on apostates, but binding the soul. The best ministers can do this only by pressing those things which are proper to bind the soul; it is the grace of God, and nothing less, that can effectually *confirm the souls of the disciples*, and prevent their apostasy.

(2.) *They exhorted them to continue in the faith*; or, as it may be read, *they encouraged them*. They told them it was both their duty and interest to persevere; to abide in the belief of Christ's being the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world. Note, Those that are in the faith are concerned to *continue in the faith*, notwithstanding all the temptations they may be under to desert it, from the smiles or frowns of this world. And it is requisite that they should often be exhorted to do so. Those that are continually surrounded with temptations to apostasy have need to be continually attended with pressing exhortations to perseverance.

(3.) That which they insisted most upon was *that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God*. Not only *they* must, but *we* must; it must be counted upon that all who will go to heaven must expect tribulation and persecution in their way thither. But is this the way to *confirm the souls of the disciples*, and to engage them to *continue in the faith*? One would think it would rather shock them, and make them weary. No, as the matter is fairly stated and taken entire, it will help to confirm

them, and fix them for Christ. It is true they will meet with tribulation, with much tribulation; that is the worst of it: but then,

[1.] It is so appointed. They must undergo it, there is no remedy, the matter is already fixed, and cannot be altered. He that has the sovereign disposal of us has determined it to be our lot that all that *will live godly in Christ Jesus should suffer persecution*; and he that has the sovereign command over us has determined this to be our duty, that all that will be Christ's disciples must *take up their cross*. When we gave up our names to Jesus Christ it was what we agreed to; when we sat down and counted the cost, if we reckoned aright, it was what we counted upon; so that if *tribulation and persecution arise because of the word* it is but what we had notice of before, it must be so: *he performeth the thing that is appointed for us*. The matter is fixed unalterably; and *shall the rock be for us removed out of its place?*

[2.] It is the lot of the leaders in Christ's army, as well as of the soldiers. It is not only *you*, but *we*, that (if it be thought a hardship) are subject to it; therefore, as your own sufferings must not be a stumbling-block to you, so neither must ours; see ~~1~~¹ Thessalonians 3:3. *Let none be moved by our afflictions, for you yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto*. As Christ did not put the apostles upon any harder service than what he underwent before them, so neither did the apostles put the ordinary Christians.

[3.] It is true we must count upon *much tribulation*, but this is encouraging, that we shall get through it; we shall not be lost and perish in it. It is a Red Sea, but the Lord has opened a way through it, for *the redeemed of the Lord to pass over*. We must go down to trouble, but we shall come up again.

[4.] We shall not only get through it, but get through it *into the kingdom of God*; and the joy and glory of the end will make abundant amends for all the difficulties and hardships we may meet with in the way. It is true *we must go by the cross*, but it is as true that if we keep in the way, and do not turn aside nor turn back, we shall *go to the crown*, and the believing prospect of this will make the tribulation easy and pleasant.

(4.) *They ordained them elders, or presbyters, in every church*. Now at this second visit they settled them in some order, formed them into religious

societies under the guidance of a settled ministry, and settled that distinction between those that are taught in the word and those that teach.

[1.] Every church had its governors or presidents, whose office it was to pray with the members of the church, and to preach to them in their solemn assemblies, to administer all gospel ordinances to them, and to take the oversight of them, *to instruct the ignorant, warn the unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, and convince gainsayers*. It is requisite that every particular church should have one or more such to preside in it.

[2.] Those governors were then elders, that had in their qualification the wisdom and gravity of seniors, and had in their commission the authority and command of seniors: not to make new laws (this is the prerogative of the Prince, the great Lawgiver; the government of the church is an absolute monarchy, and the legislative power entirely in Christ), but to see to the observance and execution of the laws Christ has made; and so far they are to be obeyed and submitted to.

[3.] These elders were *ordained*. The qualifications of such as were proposed or proposed themselves (whether the apostles or the people put them up) were judged of by the apostles, as most fit to judge; and they, having *devoted* themselves, were solemnly set *apart* to the work of the ministry, and bound to it.

[4.] These elders were ordained to them, to the disciples, to their service, for their good. Those that are in the faith have need to be built up in it, and have need of the elders' help therein *the pastors and teachers, who are to edify the body of Christ*.

(5.) *By prayer joined with fasting they commended them to the Lord, to the Lord Jesus, on whom they believed.* Note,

[1.] Even when persons are brought to believe, and that sincerely, yet ministers' care concerning them is not over; there is need of watching over them still, instructing and admonishing them still; there is still that lacking in their faith which needs to be perfected.

[2.] The ministers that take most care of those that believe must after all commend them to the Lord, and put them under the protection and guidance of his grace: *Lord, keep them through thine own name*. To his custody they must commit themselves, and their ministers must commit them.

[3.] It is by prayer that they must be commended to the Lord. Christ, in his prayer (John 17), commended his disciples to his Father: *Thine they were, and thou gavest them to me. Father, keep them.*

[4.] It is a great encouragement to us, in commending the disciples to the Lord, that we can say, "It is he in whom they believed; we commit to him those who have committed themselves to him, and who know they have *believed in one who is able to keep what they and we have committed to him against that day,*" ² Timothy 1:12.

[5.] It is good to join fasting with prayer, in token of our humiliation for sin, and in order to add vigour to our prayers.

[6.] When we are parting with our friends, the best farewell is to commend them to the Lord, and to leave them with him.

3. They went on preaching the gospel in other places where they had been, but, as it should seem had not made so many converts as that now at their return they could form them into churches; therefore thither they came to pursue and carry on conversion-work. From Antioch they *passed through Pisidia*, the province in which that Antioch stood; thence they came into the province of *Pamphylia*, the head-city of which was *Perga*, where they had been before (⁴¹³³ Acts 13:13), and came thither again to *preach the word* (v. 25), making a second offer, to see if they were now better disposed than they were before to receive the gospel. What success they had there we are not told, but that thence they *went down to Attalia*, a city of Pamphylia, on the sea-coast. They staid not long at a place, but wherever they came endeavoured to lay a foundation which might afterwards be built upon, and to sow the seeds which would in time produce a great increase. Now Christ's parables were explained, in which he compared the kingdom of heaven to a little leaven, which in time leavened the whole lump, to a grain of mustard-seed, which, though very inconsiderable at first, grew to a great tree, and to the seed which a man sowed in his ground, and it sprung up he knew not how.

III. How they at length came back to Antioch in Syria, whence they had been sent forth upon this expedition. From Attalia they came by sea to Antioch, v. 26. And we are here told,

1. Why they came thither: because *thence they had been recommended to the grace of God*, and such a value did they put upon a solemn

recommendation to the grace of God, though they had themselves a great interest in heaven, that they never thought they could show respect enough to those who had so recommended them. The brethren having recommended them to the grace of God, for the work *which they fulfilled*, now that they had fulfilled it they thought they owed them an account of it, that they might help them by their praises, as they had been helped by their prayers.

2. What account they gave them of their negotiation (v. 27): They *gathered the church together*. It is probable that there were more Christians at Antioch than ordinarily met, or could meet, in one place, but on this occasion they called together the *leading men* of them; as the heads of the tribes are often called the *congregation* of Israel, so the ministers and principal members of the church at Antioch are called the *church*. Or perhaps as many of the people as the place would hold came together on this occasion. Or some met at one time, or in one place, and others at another. But when they had called them together, they gave them an account of two things:

(1.) Of the tokens they had had of the divine presence with them in their labours: *They rehearsed all that God had done with them*. They did not tell what *they* had done (this would have savoured of vain-glory), but what God had done with them and by them. Note, The praise of all the little good we do at any time must be ascribed to God; for it is he that not only worketh in us both to will and to do, but then worketh with us to make what we do successful. God's grace can do any thing without ministers' preaching; but ministers' preaching, even Paul's, can do nothing without God's grace; and the operations of that grace must be acknowledged in the efficacy of the word.

(2.) Of the fruit of their labours among the heathen. They told how *God had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles*; had not only ordered them to be invited to the gospel feast, but had inclined the hearts of many of them to accept the invitation. Note,

[1.] There is no entering into the kingdom of Christ but by the door of faith; we must firmly believe in Christ, or we have no part in him.

[2.] It is God that opens the door of faith, that opens to us the truths we are to believe, opens our hearts to receive them, and makes this a wide door, and an effectual, into the church of Christ.

[3.] We have reason to be thankful that God has *opened the door of faith to the Gentiles*, has both sent them his gospel, which is *made known to all nations for the obedience of faith* (~~466~~ Romans 16:26), and has also given them hearts to entertain the gospel. Thus the gospel was spread, and it shone more and more, and none was able to shut this door which God had opened; not all the powers of hell and earth.

3. How they disposed of themselves for the present: *There they abode a long time with the disciples* (v. 28), longer than perhaps at first they intended, not because they *feared their enemies*, but because they *loved their friends*, and were loth to part from them.