



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Great Lion of God, Acts 14:1-28

“Paul Finishing the First Missionary Journey”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the wonderful grace that is manifested through the Lord Jesus Christ and through the preaching of the Scriptures by the apostles and others. We thank Thee for the fact that Thou has preserved this word for us and that hundreds of years later we are able to read and study the things that meant so much to the apostles and meant so much to the early church. We thank Thee for the greatness of the Son of God and the greatness of the salvation that is provided through him. And we also thank Thee for faithful men, like Paul the apostle, who was willing to give himself to the proclamation of the gospel, to the understanding of the gospel, and to the communication of the gospel to others that they, as well as we, might understand. And we pray Lord that Thou will be with us and enable us to be the kind of testimonies to Thy grace that will be part of the purpose of God and the accomplishment of all that Thou art intending to accomplish. We thank Thee for the assurance that we have that Thy wilt accomplish all of Thy purposes, and now as we follow again the life of the apostle, be with us, enable us to enter into an understanding of some of the things that motivated this great man. May they motivate us as well. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.

[Message] I thought it was a Texas cricket. [Laughter] Well, let's turn in our New Testaments to Acts chapter 14. And we're going to be looking at Acts chapter 14 verse 1 through verse 28. We are following the apostle on his first missionary journey, and he has left Antioch, and he has crossed the Mediterranean Sea, and he has finally made his way up to Antioch in Pisidia. And there he has given this magnificent message in which he has gone back over the Old Testament and traced the things that were preparations for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and then he has contended that those Old Testament things were fulfilled in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. At the conclusion of his message, he had warned them against that coming upon them which was spoken of in the prophets. “Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.”

Well we did not go into detail concerning the things that happened in Antioch after his preaching, but it's plain that what transpired was typical of the things that transpired when the apostle did preach, and that was that there was division that took place in the midst of the hearers. The Jews were, in general, opposed to the apostle, and the Gentiles were delighted that the gospel was not going out to them. The next week they came together to hear again the word of God, for the Gentiles had wanted to hear, and in fact almost the whole city of Antioch came to hear the apostle preach.

And Paul and Barnabas, evidently, they both were involved in the ministry because Luke says that they “waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.” And then he says this is in accordance with the Old Testament. The Old Testament had said that the Lord Jesus would, “Be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord,” and Luke, you'd think that Luke was a Calvinist from what he says. “As many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” It's evident from this, as I mentioned in our last

study, that faith is not that by which election takes place, but faith is the product of divine election. “As many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” And then we read, “The word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up,” the people and consequently Paul and Barnabas were expelled from out of their coasts.

Now don't worry about those men over there. That doesn't bother me in the slightest to hear that little noise. It may be that we're being taped somewhere from outer space. [Laughter] One can never tell.

But we turn now to Acts chapter 14 and we're going to look at the last stages of Paul's first missionary journey. In some ways Paul and Barnabas, like the early frontier evangelists in America, were itinerant preachers. And this chapter illustrates and illuminates their methods, their message, and also the response that they were getting. The situations were surely different from the early days when the Baptists and the Presbyterians and the Methodists made their way westward across the continent with the Anglicans remaining in the east. But nevertheless the dissemination was unchanged and it was by the method of preaching. The apostle in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 speaks about the word of the cross being foolishness to those who are hearing the message. He talks in other ways about the response that was taking place. In 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 21, the apostle writes, “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe,” notice the preaching. “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness.” So the situations are changed, but the dissemination is the same. The emphasis of the messages changes, but the essence, again, is unchanged.

Notice, for example, in verse 3, Luke says, “Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace.” Then notice the 7th verse, “And there they preached the gospel.” And then in the 21st verse, “And when they had preached the gospel to that city.” And in verse 25, “And when they had preached the word.” So, they were preaching the word. They were preaching the

gospel. They were preaching the word of his grace. He may change his tones, that is, the Lord, through his messengers, but essentially, the message is the same. The apostle will lay a great deal of stress in Lystra on the common grace that is given to all men. He will talk about the fact that God has made heaven and earth and the sea and all of the things that are in them. And he's not left himself without a witness. By doing good, giving us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness, that's a reference to the common grace that God extends to all men. And there is an expression here of his benevolent love.

So there is a slightly different emphasis that one finds in Paul's ministry at Lystra, but nevertheless, the essential message is the same. And furthermore, the responses that the apostles obtain from their ministry, is largely the same too. Usually violent, in verse 4, “The multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.” In verse 19, “And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead,” so, two negative responses to the apostle's ministry. And then in verse 28, “And there they abode long time with the disciples.” There was a good response in Antioch, and so there was a response positive in Antioch back near the land in Syria, but a negative response as the apostle continued his ministry. At Lystra there occurs a very remarkable thing. It's an incident illustrating the work of the gospel when Paul heals the man who was impotent in his feet, and it illustrates, of course, the power of the gospel and the work of the gospel. He still heals those who are lame. And it also illustrates another very important point, and that is that sometimes God may do miraculous works to accompany the preaching of the word of God, but at other times, he does not.

Now there are three missions in this chapter. There is the mission to Iconium. There is the mission to Lystra. And there is the mission to Derbe. And so we want to

take a look at those missions. And first of all, let's read now verse 1 through verse 6 of Acts chapter 14.

“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.”

Iconium was about eighty-five miles southeast of Antioch. It was a very old city. In fact, it was called in ancient times, Nanicus, and some think that Iconium, or the claim was made by some, that it was as old as Damascus, one of the oldest if not the oldest cities in the world. And there was an ancient saying that people used in order to refer to a man who was an old man. They would say to him that he's as old as Nanicus and don't use that of me. But nevertheless, that's what they used in those ancient times, “He's as old as Nanicus. It was the home of Thecla. And if you remember Thecla is the one in which there is the description of the Apostle Paul. In that particular work, and Thecla's name is part of that work, there is this description of Paul, which we've read once before, but I'll read it again. He is described as “one of moderate height, scanty hair, bow legged, with large eyes, meeting eyebrows, and rather a long nose, but is powerly in his expression. He was full of grace and pity. Now, he looked like a man. Now he had the face of an angel.”

Well, that’s probably a work that has some historicity to it but nevertheless, it’s not all together reliable. But Iconium is the place that was the home of Thecla who is referred to in the title of that work. Well the mission is described in the first verse in a very interesting way, “And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake.” Notice that adverb, “so,” and they “So spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.” There are some “so’s” in the Bible that are very important and this is one of those “so’s,” I guess. It’s not nearly as important as the one in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son,” but here it is a very interesting description of the preaching of Barnabas and of Paul. They, “So spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.”

There have been some suggestions about the significance of the “so.” Some have said, “Well it must be the eloquence of the apostle that made it possible for him to preach in such a way that a multitude believed.” And others have said, “No, it’s probably not his eloquence because after all in 1 Corinthians doesn’t he say when he preached at Corinth that he made it a point not to come in eloquence of speech. So it must have been the logic of his message, and certainly Paul could be classified as a logical man even though his sentences sometimes are strung out. He nevertheless is a man who is theologically alive and there is a great deal of logic in some of his works particularly his work such as Romans. Others have said, “No it was just simply the confidence that Paul had in his message of the Lord and the boldness with which these two men spoke.

Well I would imagine that if we were looking for some explanation of “so spake,” it would be safest to say that this is, by virtue of the power of the Holy Spirit, not simply because the apostle in 1 Corinthians says that’s the way in which he preached, but we read here in verse 3, “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.” So it would appear from that verse that the meaning of “so spake” is best

understood as the power with which the apostle spoke the word and the boldness with which he did it. Paul was not the kind of fellow, you know, who went up to someone who did not know the Lord and said, “You know sometime it would be a good idea for you to look into the matter of your salvation, sometime when you have a little bit of time to think it through.”

The man who led me to the Lord was a very bold man. He used to, if he would meet you, likely the first thing he would say to you was, “Are you born again?” I’ve seen him do that over and over again, and the Lord blessed Dr. Barnhouse’s boldness, very wonderfully. Many people, that was the first contact they ever really had with someone who put it to them that they ought to make a decision. Are you born again? And I can remember that made such an impression on us, his boldness, that when my son was just a little boy, four years old, I remember introducing or being with the man who was my father’s partner, and I think it was just about the time that Sammy was coming to an understanding of the fact that he was alive in this world and we were outside a drug store in Birmingham, Alabama. And we were standing there and Wes Overton [ph 17:28], my father’s partner, came up and stood there, and we were greeting him, and Sammy looked up, and I said, “Wes this is my son Sammy here.” And Sammy looked up at him and said, “Mr. Overton, are you born again?” [Laughter] That was the very first thing that he asked him. Well if you ask that in the right spirit, that’s a great thing to ask, and I can imagine that the apostle and Barnabas, they didn’t have any hesitancy what so ever in being as bold as possible.

So, they “So spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.” It was of course the work of the Holy Spirit, but there was boldness. “But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly.” Isn’t that interesting, “Long time therefore,” difficulties apparently for the apostle indicated that perhaps the Lord was really working here, and so, they had difficulties, but it was for that reason that they

“abode” for a long time, “speaking boldly in the Lord,” and the Lord gave testimony to his grace.

So, difficulties often indicate the working of the Lord, God. Division often is an evidence of the fact that people are paying attention to what you say. If you go into a church or go into among people, and you preach the gospel, and nobody is moved at all, negatively or positively, then you wonder if you’re really accomplishing anything. Well they were evidently accomplishing something in Iconium because there was a difference of opinion.

In verse 3 we also read that the Lord, “granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.” Now these were sovereign manifestations of the spiritual gifts. Now I want you to notice this because this is, I think, an important principle. We’re living in days in which a lot of people are moved very much by the charismatic movement. And I think that a lot of Christians really think that there must be some truth in the spiritual gifts that the charismatic’s claim. I’d like for you to notice that in Antioch there is no indication what so ever of any spiritual gifts being given. Now the apostle preached there. There were many who responded, but there is no evidence what so ever of spiritual gifts. But now in Iconium we read that “signs and wonders were done by their hands.”

In other words, spiritual gifts are sovereignly administered. They may occur in the days of the apostles, but they do not always occur. They are a sovereign manifestation of the Lord God. And of course, we must, so far as we’re concerned in nineteen hundred and eighty-three, remember that all that we claim for spiritual gifts must be in harmony with what the Bible teaches. And if we can show from Scripture that a kind of spiritual manifestation is not in accordance with the word of God, then no matter how many people claim to have had that experience, it is not true. Every true experience in the spiritual life must always be wedded to the words of the Bible. That is so important. And so often people are swayed by the so called experiences of people, but one must

constantly judge what the claims that are being made are from the teaching of the word of God itself.

Now the mission at Lystra is described in verse 7 through verse 20. We read in verse 6,

“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. And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked. And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, (or Hermes) because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people. Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they 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. And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them. And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.”

Lystra was a Roman colony, smaller than Antioch, a rural community. It was the home of a very pious Jewish woman by the name of Eunice, and also Eunice had a mother whose name was Lois. And Eunice had a son whose name was Timothy. This was Timothy's home town, Lystra. And we read in verse 8 that, “There sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet.” Evidently he was a cripple.

Now I'd like for you to know that because of what happened yesterday afternoon, I'm not impotent in my feet, but I'm impotent in my little toe. I broke my little toe yesterday afternoon, and it just illustrates the fact that you have to keep your head down. That is a golf maxim to keep your head down, and it also is a maxim that you have to pay attention to, or you too will break your little toe. So I am impotent in my little toe. If I seem to be moving around and so forth, it's hurting me a little bit there, but not sufficient to be concerned about. “And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet,” I got no sympathy whatsoever from Martha. She just laughed. [Laughter] I said, “Should I go to the doctor?” She said, “No, I'm not going to take you to the doctor.” I asked, “Could I collect from my insurance.” [Laughter] And I was told, “No,” I couldn't do that. So, I'm just a cripple, like this man here.

Here is a man who, however had never walked, and evidently, Paul and Barnabas were carrying on a ministry of preaching, and I presume that since both of them were involved in this, they were both preaching, and they both were teaching. And as the apostle was speaking, his eyes, as often happens when preachers speak, his eyes fastened upon somebody in the audience who seemed to really be listening. There are two like that in the audience tonight here. [Laughter] But anyway, this fellow was really listening, and he was responding to the apostle, and the apostle just sensed that God, the Holy Spirit was working in him because he says he, “Perceiving that he had faith to be healed.” And so he fixed his eyes upon him, and right in the midst of his message, he shouted out to him, notice he said with a loud voice, “Stand upright on thy feet.” And this fellow

leaped up and on his feet and began to walk. It's a magnificent miracle, a certain man who had never walked.

Now the incurability was emphasized by Luke. It's almost like the blind man in John chapter 9 who was blind from his birth. You remember when we were studying the blind man not long ago I made reference to the country preacher's outline. He had three points in his sermon: the man was blind, point number one; two, the man was stone blind; point number three, the man couldn't see at all. And one could have three points here: the man was lame, point two, he was a cripple, three, he couldn't walk at all. Luke stresses that. He says that he had not been able to walk, never had walked. And so, Paul “perceived that he had faith to be healed.”

Now, that puzzled me a bit, I confess, as I looked at this some time ago. I remember looking at it first and wondering what did this mean, he “Perceived that he had faith to be healed.” What preceded his faith? What was it that brought him to this faith which the apostle felt that he saw in him? Well we read in the 7th verse, “There they preached the gospel.” So, I would presume then that this faith that came to this man was the product of the word of God. Do we not read that faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God? So evidently the Holy Spirit so used the preaching of the word that faith was communicated to this man and it was evident on his faith. And that's why the apostle blurts out in this loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.”

I think there's another thing here that we should make comment about. You know the apostle is moving now, out a good ways, from his own home territory. He's now up in Asia Minor and, characteristic of the apostle is that, he doesn't change his message. It's the same old message that he has been giving evidently all along. When he was in Damascus a certain message was given to him. When he was later in Ephesus in the midst of the sorcerers, he preached the same message. When he was on the island of Cyprus with Sergius Paulus he preached the same message. When he came to Athens,

amid the philosophers and theologians there it was essentially the same message. The only thing he did was to go back to creation instead of simply to the call of Abraham.

In other words, the apostle preaches just what is found in holy Scripture. Now we are often told today that we should modify our message a bit when we go in different cultures. And in fact the culturization of preaching is something that all of our theological students are told that they should practice. It's called contextualization. And when you go in particular cultures, you should make a special effort to meet them in their particular culture. Well I don't think that the apostle tried to say things that were contrary to culture of people. He didn't try to offend them, but there is one thing that you will notice from the observance of the apostle's preaching. He preached the same message wherever he went. And I'm persuaded that that message is really the message that God honors and uses no matter where we preach that message.

Contextualization is a great word among our missiologists, but it is not a great word from the standpoint of the Bible. And I've always had a sneaking suspicion that missionaries don't study the Bible as much as they ought to. Now that's just my own personal feeling. You shouldn't blame the missionaries for it because it's my idea. But I don't think they study the Bible as they ought to. And the history of missions is that they frequently go off into ideas that are not as theologically grounded as they ought to be. It seems to me the apostle is preaching the same old message wherever he goes. It's the message of the Old Testament and of the fulfillment of it in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well this man heard Paul preach and with a single bound he began to walk. And naturally the people in this community were greatly impressed. Now to understand what happened when we read, “And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.” One needs to know a bit of the history of Lycaonia. There was an old legend in Lycaonia of the visit of Mercury and Jupiter to that place, and in this legend, Mercury and Jupiter had come and

they had gone about in the community as men, but no one had been hospitable to them. And because no one had been hospitable to them, according to the legend, they had destroyed all of the city with the exception of two people who did. I've forgotten the name of one. The name of the other was Baucis. And these two were left there and they were put in charge of a magnificent temple and controlled the worship of the two gods in that community.

Well of course the community had heard about the fact that their ancestors had not treated the gods properly, and they had suffered as a result of it. And so here is Paul, and here is Barnabas, and Barnabas evidently was a stately looking individual, the kind of person who might be a Jupiter. And Paul was the chief talker and Hermes was the interpreter of Jupiter or Mercury. He was the interpreter of the gods and the chief speaker. And so naturally it fell upon these people the idea that perhaps the two gods have come back to visit us again. And this time we don't want to treat them as our ancestors treated them and our city will be destroyed. And so they said, “The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and,” was getting ready to sacrifice to Barnabas and to Paul because, of course, they thought they were the gods. And the apostle's when they found about it,

“They rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and we preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities (these idols) unto the living God, who 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. But, nevertheless he left us witness of his common grace in the rain and fruitful seasons, and the food and the gladness” (with which we enjoy life.)

And they could hardly restrain the people from carrying out the worship and the observance of the sacrifices in their ritual to them. Well when the apostle spoke to them he, of course, referred to the unity of God in natural revelation and he spoke about how God does give testimony of his grace to us in the goodness that he shows us. But we read in verse 19, “And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.” Indignant over being duped, were they?

You know Paul wrote an Epistle to the Galatians and it is the opinion of a number of scholars, particularly British scholars, that the Galatians included these people to whom Paul ministered to in his first missionary journey. And when one reads Galatians one learns about the Galatians, that they were rather fickle because they listened to the apostle and then the apostle left, and while he was gone, they were already turning to another gospel. Were they indignant because they had been duped, they thought, by Paul and Barnabas? Was it the insanity of idolatry that they wanted to stone the apostle? We don't know, but at any rate, they did stone him. They dragged him out of the city, and they supposed that he had been dead.

And we read in verse 20, “Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.” I can just imagine what they were saying around Paul. They were saying, “Well, poor Paul. He was too bold in his preaching. He stirred them up, too much of a fanatic. We told him not to talk about how God has selected Abraham and lay stress on that.” And just about the time that they were speaking of how sad it was that Paul had been stoned to death, the apostle raised up and said, “Well you'll have to postpone my funeral. We're not going to have it now.”

“Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.” Derbe was a small town. It was the home of Gaius. Later on we'll come across Gaius in the Book of Acts chapter 20

and verse 4, and we read that the apostles went to Derbe and there they confirmed, “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.” This was only one hundred and sixty miles from Tarsus, but the lure of the lonely saints led him back. You notice that the apostle tells them to pay no attention to the temples, to the idols, to the shrines, the lust of the city, but continue in the faith. So they preached the gospel to the city and taught many, and they confirmed the souls of the disciples and exhorted them to continue in the faith.

Isn't it interest too, that the apostle says that we must, “Through much tribulation,” enter into the Kingdom of God. That would seem to indicate that the apostle regarded it as a necessary thing that Christians experience tribulation. Occasionally we get the idea that the tribulations that we suffer are because of some sin that we may have committed. But the apostle certainly gives the impression here that every Christian may expect to enter into tribulation. And my recollection, I did not look at this 22nd verse this afternoon when I was looking over this passage again, but my recollection is that that is a plural, and let me just check it for a moment because I have my Greek testament here. In Acts chapter 14 and verse 22, the apostle says, “Confirming the souls of the disciples, and encouraging them to abide in the faith, and that through many tribulations it is necessary for us to enter into the kingdom of God.”

In other words, the apostle is not talking about the Great Tribulation. He's not talking about one tribulation. But he's talking about many experiences of trials and testing's that belong to all of the Christians. So he confirmed them. He exhorted them to continue in the faith. And he warned them and admonished them and reminded them that they must enter into the Kingdom of God through many tribulations. And notice too that he does not regard them as having entered into the Kingdom of God yet. In other words, that is something that lies in the future for them. So he looked forward to the time when they would enter into the Kingdom of God. They are not in that kingdom yet.

And verse 23, “And when they had ordained them elders in every church.” Now I think that is interesting too because there are two things that interest me about that and this is one thing. We sometimes think that it is absolutely essential to have an elder or elders in a church. And in fact occasionally people feel that it is not possible to have a church if you do not have elders. Now it is clear from reading the New Testament that the church does not reach its maturity and its ideal place before the Lord until it has elders. The apostle, they were, of course, ordaining elders in every church for the simple reason that they were thought to be needful by the apostles. But will you notice that there were churches before the elders were ordained.

Now today if we were defining what a church is, we would say that it's a group of professing believers in our Lord Jesus Christ who meet regularly in one locality for the observance of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper and for the ministry of the word of God under the oversight of officers, both elders and deacons. That would be a general definition of what a local church is. But that came historically in two steps. There were churches in these places, but evidently there were as yet no men who had arisen in the body of believers who manifested the fact that they had been appointed by the Holy Spirit. You see an elder in a local church must be appointed by the Holy Spirit, not by men.

Now in Acts chapter 20 when Paul has the Ephesian elders come to Miletus in order to talk to them. He said, “Take heed to yourselves, and to the flock of God, among which the Holy Ghost has appointed you as overseers.” So in other words, a man becomes an elder by divine appointment. The other elders recognize those whom the Holy Spirit has appointed. We do not appoint elders. Elders do not appoint elders. God appoints elders. And the elders who have been appointed recognize other elders by the fact that they've been appointed by the Holy Spirit, and they are exercising oversight. That is, they're concerned with the flock. They shepherd the flock. They're concerned about the spiritual condition of the people who are meeting in the church. So those who

have been appointed by God the Holy Spirit emerge in a congregation. They are not appointed and then they become elders. But they become elders by divine appointment and are recognized by others and asked to share the burden of the body of elders.

Well Paul and Barnabas “ordained them elders in every church,” you’ll notice too that they were not elected by the local body, but they were appointed by the apostles, or ordained by the apostles in the local churches, having been, first of all, appointed by the Holy Spirit. So, “When they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.” Now I would think that the reason that the apostle was so concerned to have elders in the church is because the church is the pillar and ground of the truth. That is, the truth is committed to the body of believers. And it is the responsibility of the body of believers to guard the truth and to proclaim the truth. Paul later will say that the church is the pillar and ground of the truth. That’s why it is so important in the local church that we make every effort possible to hold to the apostolic teaching.

“After they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia.” Well they were there in the beginning of their journey, remember?

“And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia: And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.”

Now remember that we said back when Paul was in Lystra and the man who was impotent in his feet was told by Paul to “Stand up on his feet,” because Paul perceived that he had faith to be healed. And we said that that faith came from the preaching of the word of God. I’d like to suggest from the divine standpoint that faith came from God.

And that is evident from verse 27, “They rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.” So it was God who was responsible for the faith of all of those people who had believed and through the preaching of the word, they came to the faith that he himself was going to give to them. “And there they abode long time with the disciples.”

You know there must have been great anticipation, great excitement, great rejoicing at this first missionary conference, so far as we know, and what great missionaries the Lord had in Paul and Barnabas. We’ve all thought, as we thought about the missionary task, that in the case of this first missionary journey of the apostle, he did not reach down and take those who were least qualified, least likely to be missed by the church in Antioch and Syria, but took two of the most illustrious preachers and teachers and called them to the missionary task. And perhaps that is one of the reasons that often the missionary effort has failed because some who are most able to do the work may not have been willing to go. But anyway for a long time they rejoiced in what God had done as they saw him continuing to cause the gospel to go out to the Gentiles.

There are some lessons that appear here, and I’ll just mention them. We’re impressed, of course, first of all, by the fiery sword of the Christian gospel. And unless it is the same kind of gospel in our hands, it’s not the evangel of the apostles. They had a ministry of polarization, if we may call it that, because they preached the word of God in the power of Holy Spirit, and just as the Lord Jesus said, “I’ve not come to bring peace, but to bring division,” so the apostles as they preach brought division because they preached boldly the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it always makes a division among men. Some respond. Some do not respond.

And I think too as we look back over the chapter we are impressed by the power of this ancient truth. The healing of the lame man is a kind of acted parable of the mercy of God. His condition was hopeless. He was without strength, as Paul says we all are in Romans 5. He heard the gospel, and God opened his heart, the door of his heart to faith.

Mr. Spurgeon says, “Oh, glorious gospel of the blessed God, wherever we take Thee Thou art suited to the wants of men,” true Excalibur, remembering the famous sword of Lancelot. And another thing, he acted. He moved from faith to be saved to faith that saved. And that illustrates again the power of this ancient truth.

May the Lord bless this time together around the world. Let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the ministry of the apostle and Barnabas. We thank Thee for the boldness with which they proclaimed the word, for the faithfulness to the message of the word of God. And Lord, we pray that in our own Christian life we too may be bold in the proclamation of the truth. Deliver us, Lord, from fear and cowardice in standing up for Jesus Christ in our business, in our home, among our friends, Lord. Give us the boldness to give testimony to the grace of God that saves from sin. And enable us to testify to Thy grace wisely, but faithfully. We thank Thee and praise Thee for the goodness shown to us...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]