

## The Stoning of Paul

And when there was an assault made .... They were aware 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

Acts 14:5-7

### God's Purpose in Persecution

Driven from Antioch by the outbreak of persecution, Paul and Barnabas moved on to Iconium. There was about ninety miles between the two towns, and now they might reasonably hope to be at peace. Iconium was a fine strategic point. The Roman roads between east and west ran through it. Many a morning Paul would be wakened from sleep by the noise of some caravan under his window as it rolled westward with its eastern merchandise. And again, it would be the tramp of Roman legions as they marched eastward along the military way. All this would have set the heart of Paul a-throbbing. Maybe his preaching of the Word would reach to the end of the world from Iconium? Paul might have settled at Iconium for years if God had not said to him, "This is not your rest." That is one purpose which persecution serves. It is God's way of bidding His soldiers march. Jesus was thinking of far more than personal safety when He bade His disciples flee from city to city (Mat\_10:23). Just as the wind effects the falling rain and drives it away till it falls on distant fields, so persecution, striking on the Gospel, carries it to unexpected spots. Paul and Barnabas had to flee from Iconium. It was the Jews who stirred up trouble again.

**THE APOSTLES WERE LEARNING, IN A VERY BITTER WAY, HOW A MAN'S FOES CAN BE THOSE OF HIS OWN HOUSEHOLD.**

**THERE IS NO FOE SO DANGEROUS OR SO RELENTLESS AS AN OLD FRIEND WHO HAS TURNED DEAD AGAINST US.**

## **Into the Land of Wolves for a Purpose**

About forty miles from Iconium lies Lystra in the wild and dreary plains of Lycaonia. Lycaonia means the Land of Wolves, and we can picture the desolate region by the name. I think that when Paul crossed into that wolf-land he would remember the saying of his Master, "Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves, be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Mat\_10:16). To Lystra, then, Paul and Barnabas fled, and there they preached. And at Lystra, by the power of Jesus, Paul healed the cripple. You could tell that the writer (Luke) had been a doctor by the fond minuteness with which he describes the disease. Most writers would just have said that the man was lame. But the physician made a much fuller diagnosis. The man was impotent in both his feet; he had been so from birth; he had never walked. Do you see how all the training we have had can be used in the long run towards glorifying God? Luke never thought of that when he was studying medicine; but the miracle is doubly vivid just because he studied. So, every interest we ever had, and every pursuit we were ever zealous over, and every hobby that once fascinated us, no matter how childish or slight it may have been— all these, when we are Christ's, shall prove of service. It is the vessel full of water that becomes wine.

## **The People of Lystra Recalled the Legend of Baucis and Philemon**

Now there was a legend very well known in Lystra, for the scene of it was that very region—it was the legend of Baucis and Philemon. The Lystran children used to gather around their mothers and beg for the story of Baucis and Philemon. Baucis and Philemon were two humble cottagers to whom Jupiter and Mercury had come disguised. The gods had knocked in vain at every other door, but these two lowly souls gave them a welcome. It is a sweet story, exquisitely told by Ovid; it was devoutly believed in the homes of Lystra. Many a mother would call her son Philemon with the prayer that Jupiter might come again. Who, then, were these two strangers in the town who had healed the lame man in such a marvelous way? Was not one of them august and kingly and the other all life and activity and eloquence? It ran like wildfire through the marketplace that here were Jupiter and Mercury returned. Paul did not understand what all the stir was.

The excited people fell back on their own dialect. He felt as helpless as a we would feel in the middle of a crowd all speaking Russian. But when a solemn procession halted before his lodging, and he saw the oxen with garlands on their heads, it flashed on him in a moment what was happening, and he and Barnabas sprang out to stop the blasphemy. Had it been Jews whom Paul was called to speak to, you would have had plenty of texts from the Old Testament. Had the crowd been an Athenian crowd, there would have been swift appeals to history and art. It shows the infinite tact of the apostle that with these rude folks he argued from the rain (Act\_5:17). It was a sore disappointment to excited Lystra; the current of feeling very swiftly changed. We are not surprised a few days later to find Paul stoned and left for dead.

## **Paul Saw That the Cripple Had Faith**

- 1. First, the keen eyesight of a saint (Act\_5:9). Paul saw in a twinkling that the cripple had faith. There was something in the face of this poor sufferer that told the apostle that true faith was there. Our Savior was always on the outlook for faith, and Paul had caught this secret from the Master. There is nothing like love and fellowship with Christ for revealing the best points in a poor beggar's face.**
- 2. There is a meaning even in a raindrop (Act\_5:17). It had often spoken to Paul of the Creator.**
- 3. Lastly, (we cannot learn this too young) that today's sacrifice may be tomorrow's stoning. One day, with Jesus, it was "Hosanna"; a little afterwards, "Crucify Him, Crucify Him." And one day, with Paul, it was "He is a god"; a little afterwards, "Stone him and cast him out."**

Now I want no one to become cynical. The world is a kindly and happy and pleasant place. We are amazed as we struggle through life at the loyalty and love that surround us.

- Let's set our affections on things which are above,
- not to rate very highly human praise,
- not to be greatly depressed by human censure.

Had Paul been desperately anxious to please Lystra, I believe the stoning would have killed him.