

Joseph Carty / General

Acts / Mission; Persecution; Martyrdom; Resurrection / Acts 14

For many years, Paul had carried with him the guilt of his persecutions of Christians. Fresh were the memories of the martyrdom of Stephen. When the same happened to him, Paul accepted it as he due consequences. But God had different plans, Paul would not remain dead.

Back Story

- Continue Story
 - [Acts 14](#)
 - 1st Mission Journey
 - Hundreds of miles
- Picking up from last week:
 - Pisidia
 - going well until...

[Acts 13:49–52](#) (ESV)

And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city,

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stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

- Reoccurring story
 - convert lots of people
 - Jews get angry
 - persecute them
 - chase them off
- Same thing happens
 - in each town.

More Persecution

Acts 14:1-2 ESV

Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the

brothers.

- Group Think:

A few years ago psychologist Ruth W. Berenda and her associates carried out an interesting experiment with teenagers designed to show how a person handled group pressure. The plan was simple. They brought groups of ten adolescents into a room for a test. Subsequently, each group of ten was instructed to raise their hands when the teacher pointed to the longest line on three separate charts. What one person in the group did not know was that nine of the others in the room had been instructed ahead of time to vote for the second-longest line.

Regardless of the instructions they heard, once they were all together in the group, the nine were not to vote for the longest line, but rather vote for the next to the longest line. The experiment began with nine teen-agers voting for the wrong line. The stooge would typically glance around, frown in confusion, and slip his hand up with the group. The instructions were repeated and the next card was raised. Time after time, the self-conscious stooge would sit there saying a short line is longer than a long line, simply because he lacked the courage to challenge the group. This remarkable conformity occurred in about 75% of the cases, and was true of small children and high-school students as well. Berenda concluded that, "Some people had rather be president than right," which is certainly an accurate assessment.

C. Swindoll, Living Above the Level of Mediocrity, p. 225.

- It wasn't all bad
 - they had great success

- many people received:

Acts 14:3 ESV

So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

- Some were coming to faith.
 - Jews Jealous
 - Satan Jealous
 - uses his people.

An old fable that has been passed down for generations tells about an elderly man who was traveling with a boy and a donkey. As they walked through a village, the man was leading the donkey and the boy was walking behind. The townspeople said the old man was a fool for not riding, so to please them he climbed up on the animal's back. When they came to the next village, the people said the old man was cruel to let the child walk while he enjoyed the ride. So, to please them, he got off and set the boy on the animal's back and continued on his way. In the third village, people accused the child of being lazy for making the old man walk, and the suggestion was made that they both ride. So the man climbed on and they set off again. In the fourth village, the townspeople were indignant at the cruelty to the donkey because he was made to carry two people. The frustrated man was last seen carrying the donkey down the road.

We smile, but this story makes a good point: We can't please everybody, and if we try we end up carrying a heavy burden. Well-meaning Christians may offer

us advice, and much of it is valuable. But when we try to do everything other believers want us to do, we can easily become frustrated and confused . That's why we need to remember that the One we must please above all others is Christ. And we do that by obeying God's Word. Carried any donkeys lately? You don't have to if you're trying to please Jesus.

Source Unknown.

[Acts 14:4-6](#) (ESV)

But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews,

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with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country,

- Jews stir up trouble
 - severe persecution.

› Persecution

- › natural result of Proclamation.

- Christ always brought
 - persecution.

“Westerners, 2,000 years removed from the first Christmas, are tempted to assume that there could hardly be anything more innocent, non-threatening, and “non-political” than a baby in a manger. Yet the birth of a baby that first Christmas resulted in a horrific wave of *persecution*; thousands of young boys under the age of two were killed while the baby’s family fled to Egypt.” (Chris Seiple, *The Politics of Christmas*).

- Our belief
 - stop persecution
 -
- To stop it
 - stop preaching!
 -
- What did Paul do?
-
- Instead,
 - accept persecution
 - preach anyway

Plot thickens

- Gain intel.
 - plan to kill
 - by stoning
 - flees to
 - neighboring area
- Only 20 miles away.
 - Jews have connections there...

Acts 14:7 ESV

and there they continued to preach the gospel.

- They fled
 - but not far enough.

Rev. Saul Paul
Independent, Missionary
Corinth, Greece

Dear Mr. Paul:

We recently received an application from you for service under our Board.

It is our policy to be as frank and open-minded as possible with all our applicants. We have made an exhaustive survey of your case. To be plain, we are surprised that you have been able to pass as a bonafide missionary.

We are told that you are afflicted with a severe eye trouble. This is certain to be an insuperable handicap to an effective ministry. Our Board requires 20-20 vision.

At Antioch, we learn, you opposed Dr. Simon Peter, an esteemed denominational secretary and actually rebuked him openly and publicly. You stirred up so much trouble at Antioch that a special Board meeting had to be convened at Jerusalem. We cannot condone such actions.

Do you think it seemly for a missionary to do part-time secular work? We hear that you are making tents on the side. In a letter to the church at Philippi, you admitted that they are the only church supporting you. We wonder why.

Is it true that you have a jail record? Certain brethren reported that you did two years time at Caesarea and were imprisoned at Rome.

You made such trouble for the businessmen at Ephesus that they refer to you as 'the man who turned the world upside down.' Sensationalism in missions is uncalled for. We also deplore the lurid "over-the-wall-in-a-basket episode" at Damascus.

We are appalled at your obvious lack of conciliatory behavior. Diplomatic men are not stoned and dragged out of the city gate, or assaulted by furious mobs. Have you ever suspected that gentler words might gain you more friends? I enclose a copy of the book by Dailus Carnagus, "How to Win Jews and Influence Greeks."

In one of your letters you refer to yourself as "Paul the Aged." Our new mission

policies do not envisage a surplus of super-annuated recipients.

We understand that you are given to fancies and dreams. At Troas, you saw "a man of Macedonia? and at another time "were caught up into the third heaven? and even claimed the 'lord stood by you.? We reckon that more realistic and practical minds are needed in the task of world evangelism.

You have caused much trouble wherever you have gone. You opposed the honorable women at Berea and the leaders of your own nationality in Jerusalem. If a man cannot get along with his own people, how can he serve foreigners'

We learn that you are a snake handler? At Malta, you picked up a poisonous serpent which is said to have bitten you, but you did not suffer harm. Tsk, tsk!

You admit that while serving time at Rome that "all forsook you.? Good men are not left friendless. Three fine brothers by the names of Diotrephes, Demas, and Alexander the coppersmith have notarized affidavits to the effect that it is impossible for them to cooperate with either you or your program.

We know that you had a bitter quarrel with a fellow missionary, Barnabas. Harsh words do not further God's work.

You have written many letters to churches where you have formerly been pastor. In one of these letters, you accused a church member of living with his father's wife, and you caused the whole church to feel badly; and the poor fellow was expelled.

You spend too much time talking about the 'second coming of Christ.? Your letters to the people of Thessalonica are devoted almost entirely to this theme. Put first things first from now on.

Your ministry has been far too flighty to be successful. First Asia Minor, then Macedonia, then Greece, then Italy, and now you are talking about a wild goose chase to Spain. Concentration is more important than dissipation of one's powers. You cannot win the whole by yourself. You are just one little

Paul.

In a recent sermon you said, "God forbid that I should glory in anything save the cross of Christ.? It seems to us that you ought also to glory in our heritage, our denominationalism and program, the unified budget, and the world Federation of Churches.

Your sermons are much too long at times. At one place, you talked until after midnight and a young man was so asleep that he fell out of the window and broke his neck. Nobody is saved after the first twenty minutes. 'stand up, speak up, and then shut up? is our advice.

Dr. Luke reports that you are a thin, little man, bald, frequently sick, and always so agitated over your churches, that you sleep very poorly. He reports that you pad around the house praying half the night. A healthy mind in a robust body is our ideal for all applicants. A good night's sleep will give you zest and zip, so that you wake up full of zing.

We find it best to send only married men into foreign service. We deplore your policy of persistent celibacy, Simon Magus has set up a matrimonial bureau at Samaria, where the names of some very fine widows are available.

It hurts me to tell you this, Brother Paul, but in all of my twenty-five years experience, I have never met a man so opposite to the requirements of our Foreign Mission Board. If we accepted you, we would break every rule of modern missionary practice.

Most sincerely yours,
J. Flavius Fluffyhead
Foreign Mission Board
Secretary

J. Harold Smith, "Your Good Neighbor?, November, 1952

Miracles

- In Lystra
 - God does miracles...

Acts 14:8-10 **ESV**

Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking.

- Healed a cripple from birth.
 - Paul and Barnabas
 - already had success
 - in reaching people.
- But when they crowds
 - see this happen
 - they go crazy.

[Acts 14:11-13](#) (ESV)

And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” Barnabas they called Zeus,

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and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.

- They begin to
 - worship them
 - as gods!
- Their beliefs
 - gods come down.
- Supernatural
 - work of God
 - Must be gods!
 - Zeus
 - Hermes

- Worship them
 - perform animal sacrifice
 - in worship!

Acts of the Apostles (Chapter 18—Preaching among the Heathen)

Paul and Barnabas, who had sought retirement and rest, were not aware of these preparations. Soon, however, their attention was attracted by the sound of music and the enthusiastic shouting of a large crowd who had come to the house where they were staying. - AA 181

- Resting
 - taking a break
 - loud party
 - came to house
 - confusion
 - worshipping them!!!

[Acts 14:14-15](#) (ESV)

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men,

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of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.

- They run out
 - try to stop
 - sacrifice to them!

- › God often destroys
 - › Spiritual leaders
 - › through flattery
 - › be careful

David and Solomon

flattery first

belief they were above law

wicked sin

Francois Fenelon was the court preacher for King Louis XIV of France in the

17th century. One Sunday when the king and his attendants arrived at the chapel for the regular service, no one else was there but the preacher. King Louis demanded, "What does this mean?" Fenelon replied, "I had published that you would not come to church today, in order that your Majesty might see who serves God in truth and who flatters the king."

Most of us would rather be hurt by flattery than helped by criticism.

Acts 14:18 ESV

Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

- Barley stopped them...

Acts of the Apostles Chapter 18—Preaching among the Heathen

So firm had been their belief that these men were indeed gods, and so great their enthusiasm, that they were loath to acknowledge their error. The record says that they were "scarce restrained."

- Pagans want
 - to be pagan.
- They are upset

- not able to sacrifice.
- Go to other extreme...
 - From worship
 - To attacking!

Acts 14:19 ESV

But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.

- They stoned him.
 - drug lifeless body
 - out of city
 - no burial!
- How did they turn
 - worship to murder?
- Just like Jesus
 - Palms Sunday

- singing: Hosanna!
- Good Friday
- Crucify Him!

Mob Mentality

- These days
 - such strong opinions
 - politics
 - religion
 - sports
 - argumentation
 - rivalry
 - followings
 - polarization
 - extremism
 - tables are set!

› Last days

- › People don't think
- › They respond emotionally.

Crowd control is the method of making sure that a large crowd does not get out of hand. But the term may also refer to the control a crowd can wield over an individual. I was reminded of this in a newspaper article about an old carnival headliner nicknamed "Cannonball." In his younger days he was blasted out of a cannon 1,200 times. When asked why he did this, he replied, "Do you know what it's like to feel the applause of 60,000 people? That's why I did it!"

- Am I getting
 - worked up too much?
 - following with excitement?
 - picking sides?
 - enjoying argumentation?
 - enjoying crowd energy?
 - Think about that....

Dead in Christ

- Paul was dead
 - not unconscious
- But he was
 - dead in other ways.
- Committed to God
 - willing to suffer

Stephen

Acts of the Apostles Chapter 18—Preaching among the Heathen

The martyrdom of Stephen, and the cruel part that he himself had acted upon that occasion, came vividly to his mind.

- Paul remembered
 - accepted
 - deserved
 - dead in Christ
 - spiritually

- physically
- What Jesus means...

John 11:25–26 ESV

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

Awkward Funeral

Acts 14:20 ESV

But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.

- Believers Gathered
 - Mourning
 - crying
 - funeral
 - burial
- Not so fast
 - I’m alive!!!

- Gets up
 - walks back into city!
- Leaves to Derbe

Acts 14:21 ESV

When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,

- Took time away.
 - but came back.
- Didn't give up.
 - took break
 - returned.

› Flee Persecution?

› What about those that stayed?

- › What about MBB?
- › Get them out?
- › Who will witness?

An early Christian leader named Tertullian (164-200AD) declared: “Kill us, torture us, condemn us, grind us to dust. The more you mow us down, the more we grow, for the seed of the church is the blood of the Christians. Every single drop of our blood springs up, in some thirty, in some sixty and in some and hundred-fold.” There are times in our lives when we must make a stand. There is no room to give in to the urge to cut and run in cowardly retreat!
(Source Unknown)

Summary

- We are called to do mission work, no matter the cost to ourselves.
- Persecution is a result of witnessing.
- We cannot stop witnessing therefore we cannot stop persecution.
- We must accept persecution and persevere through it.

- › Why do we often neglect witnessing?

› Fear

rejection

won't say it right

› Embarrassment

› Shame

› Those are natural results.

› We must witness anyway.

Hitler imprisoned a German pastor, Martin Niemoeller, for eight years. He spent some time in prisons and concentration camps, including Dachau. Hitler realized that if Niemoeller, a First World War hero, could be persuaded to join his cause then much opposition would collapse, so he sent a former friend of Niemoeller to visit him, a friend who now supported the Nazis. Seeing Niemoeller in his cell, the one time friend is reported as saying, "Martin, Martin! Why are you here?" To which he received from Niemoeller the response, "My friend! Why are you not here?" (*Owen Bourgaize - Sermon Central*).

Appeal

- Witness with all your heart.
- Witness in your

- home
 - neighborhood
 - work
 - church
 - community
 - state
 - country
 - abroad
-
- Find a way to witness!