

The Rest of the Story

Studies in the Book of Acts

“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it – but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”

Vance Havner

Text

Acts 14:19-28

Topic

The disciples suppose Paul is dead from being stoned but he miraculously recovers and continues his mission

Title

Back to the Stoned Age

Acts 14:19 Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul *and* dragged *him* out of the city, supposing him to be dead.

Acts 14:20 However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

Acts 14:21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch,

Acts 14:22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and *saying*, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

Acts 14:23 So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Acts 14:24 And after they had passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia.

Acts 14:25 Now when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.

Acts 14:26 From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed.

Acts 14:27 Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

Acts 14:28 So they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

Introduction

Was Paul dead or just mostly dead?

Either way, when the disciples gathered around him he looked dead to them.

I want to suggest that anytime anyone looked at the apostle Paul he looked dead to them!

To be more precise, he always looked like he was **dying**. It's how Paul described himself in Second Corinthians 4:8-10 when he said,

2 Corinthians 4:8 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair;

2 Corinthians 4:9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed -

2 Corinthians 4:10 **always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus...**

Anyone looking at Paul's life as a servant of Jesus Christ would conclude he was **always carrying about in [his physical] body the dying of the Lord Jesus**. Partly because he was so marked with the scars of his beatings and journeyings. But he also meant that on a daily basis he was suffering from troubles and persecutions for the sake of Jesus that could immediately cost him his earthly life.

Why must Paul suffer so for Jesus? Let's read the rest of Second Corinthians 4:10, which says,

2 Corinthians 4:10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, **that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.**

The life of Jesus Christ was revealed by Paul in his constant **dying**. As he suffered serving his Lord it was apparent that Jesus Christ's supernatural life was at work in Paul. The more he seemed to be dying, the more Jesus was showing onlookers genuine supernatural life.

It doesn't really matter if Paul was dead or mostly dead from the stoning. He was already **dying** every day. Whether he was miraculously healed from near-death or resurrected it was an example of the kind of supernatural life that was always at work in Paul.

We may not ever face life-threatening persecution. But, like Paul, we are to think of ourselves as **always carrying about in [our bodies] the dying of the Lord Jesus**. We should expect trials, troubles, afflictions, and adversities. And we should see them as opportunities for the Lord to make apparent to those watching us that His supernatural life is at work in us.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You Carry In Your Body The Dying Of Your Lord, and #2 You Care For The Body With The Life Of Your Lord.

#1 You Carry In Your Body The Dying Of Your Lord (v19-20)

Paul and Barnabas were on a mission trip deep in Gentile territory. The citizens of Lystra had mistaken them for their gods – Zeus and Hermes to be exact. The missionaries put a stop to the idolatry.

An interval of time passed. One day in Lystra Paul and Barnabas awoke to a violent mob:

Acts 14:19 Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul *and* dragged *him* out of the city, supposing him to be dead.

Earlier on this trip the Jews at **Antioch** (of Pisidia) **and Iconium** had expelled the missionaries from their cities. Not satisfied, they traveled the one-hundred miles or so to Lystra. They **persuaded the multitudes to stone Paul**.

It was a typical day in the life of Paul. He never knew when he'd be stoned; or robbed; or shipwrecked; or flogged; or imprisoned. He carried around the **dying** of his Lord.

They stoned him and **dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead**. Was he dead? Some commentators say he was dead and think that this is when Paul had his I've-been-to-Heaven experience. But the chronology of his visit to Lystra and that experience don't line-up. Even if the timing was right, when Paul discussed his visit to Heaven he wasn't certain if he was really dead or not.

The folks who say he was only mistaken for dead point to Dr. Luke's use of the word **supposing**. However, the word doesn't indicate doubt. It's a word that is used when you've come to a conclusion based on evidence. It may be that they had examined Paul and determined he was dead.

We can't know for sure; and it doesn't really matter. Either way a miracle took place:

Acts 14:20 However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

Don't pass over the words **the disciples**. Paul and Barnabas were traveling alone. The presence of **disciples** indicates that there were conversions in Lystra.

While gathered **around him**, Paul **rose up**. *I wonder who jumped!* Even if they were praying for Paul to be raised it would have been quite a shock.

If Paul was dead and resurrected, it was a miracle. If he was not dead it was still a miracle. He was thoroughly healed – except for the marks his body would bear for the rest of his life.

Perhaps the most amazing thing is that Paul **went into the city**. **He went back into Lystra!** It wasn't until the **next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe**.

It was more than courage. As he walked through the town he was quite literally **carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body**.

The Lystran's might have called him a dead man walking. He was really a **dying** man walking. He was constantly **dying** and ready to die so that onlookers could see the power of the life of Jesus.

Making an application of this to our lives, Alan Redpath said, In any and every circumstance where there would normally be a reaction that reveals self, there is instead a reaction that reveals the character of Jesus Christ... If you are prepared to... [bear] about in your body the death of Jesus Christ, [then He will be revealed].

When you are mistreated in some way, if you bear it as a dying person then the life of Jesus will be shown to those watching. It's more real than your words because there is a power and grace in suffering for the Lord that cannot be denied.

Here's another way of putting it: **Let them stone you!** Then just get up and go about acting like Jesus Christ.

#2 You Care For The Body With The Life Of Your Lord (21-28)

There is another 'body' in these verses. It is the body of Jesus Christ. It's a Bible metaphor to describe the spiritual connection of each and every believer with each other and with the Lord. With Jesus as the Head, we are to fit together and work together as if we were the members of His body.

As Paul and Barnabas wind-up their travels and head for home we see how much they cared for the body of Jesus Christ.

Acts 14:21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch,

God granted them success in **Derbe**. Then somehow the Holy Spirit let them know that it was time to return. Rather than take a shorter, more direct route they determined to back-track through the cities they had visited.

They went back to **Lystra** and again walked among those who had stoned Paul. Then on to **Iconium** and **Antioch** of Pisidia from whence the Jews had come who incited the mob to stone them. **Carrying**

about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

There was another reason they back-tracked. They wanted to visit the **disciples** they had left behind in each city.

Acts 14:22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and *saying*, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

Acts 14:23 So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Strengthening the souls of disciples should always be on our minds. Every encounter I have with another believer is my opportunity to see them spiritually strengthened. God forbid I would weaken them!

Paul and Barnabas strengthened the souls of the disciples by doing five things. First, they **exhort[ed] them to continue in the faith**. This isn't a reference to having **faith** in general. **The faith** is a term that means the beliefs of orthodox biblical Christianity. Paul and Barnabas grounded them in Bible doctrine.

It matters a great deal what you believe. Your beliefs determine your behavior. We need regular, systematic exposure to God's Word. It may sound basic but it's always under attack.

Second, Paul and Barnabas told them the truth about **suffering**. The **kingdom** was coming; it **is** coming. Jesus promised to return and rule over this earth. In the mean time we will suffer many things.

It may not win you any points towards popularity but you need to remind believers that suffering is part of the total package. You need to remind them that they are to carry in their bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus so that His life can shine through.

Third, they **appointed elders in every church**. **Appointed** can mean *elected* or it can mean *selected*. We can't be sure if they voted on who the elders should be; or if they were selected by Paul and Barnabas.

Just a quick footnote. Scholars argue for one of three possible forms of church government they see presented in the Bible. The bottom line is that there is no one form of church government that can be identified as the only biblical form. Instead we see that God raises-up pastor-teachers, elders, and deacons in each local church. These men work together to lead the local church by serving it and giving the other members an example.

The appointment of **elders** in the local churches presumes many things:

1. It presumes that every disciple will be a member of a local fellowship of believers.
2. It presumes that the Lord's plan for evangelizing nonbelievers and edifying believers is the local church.
3. It presumes organization in which all members are submitted to one another and to the Lord.

We could go on and on. The doctrine of the church is a big subject. I simply want to point out the absolute love for the church that both Jesus and His apostles had. We should love it, too.

The fourth thing Paul and Barnabas did to strengthen the souls of the disciples was to **pray with fasting**. I'm sure they **prayed with fasting** to appoint the elders. But it also establishes the primacy of prayer with **fasting** in general. I'm preaching to myself when I say we need to pray with **fasting** more and more. It is a lost spiritual discipline.

Then the fifth thing they did was **commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed**. They pointed them to Jesus. All of our discipleship ought to have as its goal producing a strong believer who trusts fully in his or her Lord to satisfy their deepest desires and needs.

Do you want to have your soul strengthened? Be a vital part of a local fellowship where **the faith** is being taught from the Bible. Pray with fasting. Have a theology of suffering. Look beyond people to Jesus to satisfy your deepest desires and needs.

Acts 14:24 And after they had passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia.

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Acts 14:26 From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed.

Perga wasn't mentioned before. It seems they still did some pioneering on the way home. It's a reminder to be flexible. Just because their current job description was 'returning missionaries' didn't cancel-out their stepping back into their roles of 'pioneer missionaries.' We are servants available to do any and all our Master asks of us.

Acts 14:27 Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

Acts 14:28 So they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

How much fun was that! It reminds us that we share in each other's serving. Paul and Barnabas were sent-out representing Jesus but also representing every disciple in the church at Antioch.

Want to get 'reward points' in Heaven? **Support your church!** Attend; give; fast; pray. God credits your heavenly account. We all share equally in the spiritual spoil.

Applying God's Word...

We need to get back to living in the stoned-age!

As we await the coming of the Lord for us we carry in our bodies the dying of the Lord so His life can be made real to onlookers. I simply get up and go about my business so the supernatural, resurrection life of Jesus is unmistakable to my persecutors.

If I get stoned, literally or figuratively, I have stoned-age brothers and sisters to care for and to care for me.