

“DANGERS, TOILS, AND SNARES BRING VICTORY”

Acts 14:1-20, 21-28

January 11 & 12, 2025

“Harriet Tubman escaped from slavery in 1849. She immediately became involved in the abolitionist movement, organizing meetings, speaking against slavery, and the like.

“But that wasn't enough for Tubman. She decided to return to the South secretly and deliver other slaves to freedom. It was a great risk, because if she had been caught, she would certainly have been thrown back into slavery—or killed as an example to other potential runaways.

“But not only did she return to the South that one time, she went back 19 times, to eventually rescue some 300 fellow slaves. Each trip became more risky, as slave catchers were on the alert for her. But each time she embarked on the journey, and each time, with God's help, she confessed, she evaded the authorities.”<sup>1</sup>

Harriet Tubman had a passion for freeing her own people from the evils of slavery, and because of her persistence, courage and determination, she began the movement to end slavery in the United States. Though it would be years, even decades later that slavery would be abolished, Harriet put her life's ambitions into freeing other African-Americans.

Likewise, Barnabas and Paul had become freed from sin as they became converted into the Christian faith. As they grew in their faith in Jesus Christ, they, too, became intent upon freeing as many slaves to sin as they could from the evils of this world by taking the Good News of Jesus Christ into the regions of the eastern Mediterranean Sea. Beginning on the island of Cyprus, they “*proclaimed the Word of God in the Jewish synagogues*” (Acts 13:5), telling all the people who would listen about the Salvation of Jesus Christ. They moved from there into Pamphylia and took the Gospel to the people of Pisidian Antioch, delivering many to the

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<sup>1</sup> (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, (Nashville, TN: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002) pg. 53)

Christian faith. Day and night, they witnessed boldly to those around them so that they, too could become freed from their sins and find eternal life as a child of God through Jesus.

All along their way, they faced disbelief and obstinate refusal to accept all that the Old Testament Scriptures had to say about the promised Messiah. While many people believed that Jesus was and is the Messiah, God's Son, sent to Earth to be our Savior, there were many in the Jewish synagogues that would not accept this Good News. They were so steeped in following the traditions of the Mosaic Law that they could not bring themselves to accept that the promises of God in that Mosaic Law of a Messiah had finally been accomplished. Despite all their efforts to bring the Old Testament Scriptures to life so that everyone could see the prophetic promises fulfilled in Jesus, many would not believe that Jesus was/is the Messiah, the Son of God.

So Barnabas and Paul continued on in their travels to other towns with the salvation of God in Jesus Christ. They followed Jesus' instructions to the disciples - that when they got to a town or city or people that would not accept Jesus as Savior and Lord, they shook off the dust from their feet and moved on.

Today, we heard of their arrival at Iconium. And as was their custom, they began telling the Good News of Jesus in the synagogue to all of their fellow Jews. And "*they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed*" (Acts 14:1). Their message of God's Salvation through Jesus Christ touched the hearts of the people, and they received Him as their Savior. There was a spiritual hunger all around the region of Lycaonia (lik-ah-oh-nee-ah), where people were striving to find something worthwhile to put their life's purpose in.

But even there, some were so stuck in their traditions that even when they heard the truth, they balked at what was being told to them, and they refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah.

Even then, *“Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of His grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders”* (14:3).

Now, we’re not told what those signs and wonders were in Iconium, but the people were able to see the true power of the Holy Spirit, not only in their words, but also in their actions. And yet, despite those signs and wonders, some still refused to accept that Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah, the Son of God, come to save all people from their sins. But Barnabas and Paul continued to speak to the people to reach as many as they could. They were **not** preaching their own gospel message. It was the message of God’s great work done through Jesus Christ as our Savior that they told others about. There was no Pauline Gospel, except the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

So as they shared the Good News of God’s Salvation through Jesus Christ, there was a division in Iconium between those who believed the Gospel message of Jesus, and those who refused to believe. Many there in Iconium understood what Barnabas and Paul were saying and both Jews and Gentiles joyfully believed that Jesus is the Savior, God’s Messiah. Their hearts were changed from following empty rules and regulations given to them from their religious leaders in an attempt to bring them salvation from their sins. And upon believing what they were saying, they began to follow the teachings of Jesus, who offers them the love of God and eternal life.

Now folks, this is evident even today, when missionaries go into towns and villages around the globe and begin to present the Gospel of Jesus to the people. For many it is the greatest news they have ever heard, so they profess Jesus Christ as their Savior and they begin to follow Him in all their ways. And their lives are changed forever for the good, as they begin living for Jesus in all they do and say.

For others, however, the news about Jesus flies in the face of all they have been taught, up to that time, and they reject the truth of God's Salvation given through Jesus. And it is those who reject the truth of Jesus Christ that begin to rile up the people against those who have professed their faith in Jesus. A division is created, and often the missionaries are attacked or driven out of the town or village or city. And then persecution comes upon those who remain faithful to Jesus as their Savior. Many face horrible attacks from folks in the community, even their own family members, in an attempt to bring them back into their previous belief system. Some are thrown out of their homes; some are beaten and abused; others are even threatened with death, all in the attempt to get them to recant their faith in Jesus Christ.

It's happening all around the world, that Christians are being punished, even martyred, for daring to profess Jesus as their Savior. But they are boldly standing up as followers of Jesus Christ, and those around them are noticing the difference in their lives, and are, in many cases, finding Jesus through the witness of those persecuted Christians in those communities.

Well, that is precisely what happened with Barnabas and Paul. *"There was a plot afoot among both Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, where they continued to preach the Gospel"* (14:5-7). Though they faced persecution, Barnabas and Paul stood their ground in faith in Jesus and went from one place to another continuing to tell others about the Great Good News of Jesus' Salvation for any who would believe. They were so bent upon freeing as many from the wages of sin, which is eternal death, that they kept on telling those around them about the Good News of Jesus. They did not shrink back, afraid that persecution might come to them. They kept on presenting the message of Salvation to all the people so that everyone could hear, and become transformed by Jesus.

Leaving Iconium they went to Lystra. In Lystra they had the chance to demonstrate the great power of Jesus Christ's healing. There was a man who was listening, who had been lame since birth, never to have walked one step in his life, began to believe. As Paul looked into his eyes, he "*saw that he had faith to be healed...*" (14:9). So Paul called out to him, "*Stand up on your feet!*" (14:10) and the man was instantly healed! He had never walked in his life, but at Paul's command he stood up and began to walk around. The Holy Spirit worked through Paul to bring healing to this unnamed man as an example of the great power of God in Jesus Christ.

But once again, the people misunderstood. The Gentiles immediately announce that Barnabas is Zeus, and Paul is Hermes (14:12), and they get so excited that their gods are among them they want to offer sacrifices to them. It's a case of mistaken identity and Paul and Barnabas are hard pressed to keep the people from treating them like gods.

In their defense, they proclaim "*Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them*" (14:15).

It's so true even in our own day today. A person is given the ability to heal or do something fantastic by the power of the Holy Spirit, and those around them want to begin to worship them as if they were God. Sadly, some accept their worship and are therefore "deified" among the people, even though they have no power on their own to save anyone or do anything. The people become confused and if the pastor or other person doesn't correct them right away, the people become misled into thinking that that person has done the great work instead of it being God's work through Jesus Christ. Many a thriving ministry has become bankrupt in faith because the people have worshipped the leader rather than giving praise and glory to God.

But if that's not bad enough, Paul and Barnabas then become the object of further attack when folks from Antioch and Iconium show up. They "*won the crowd over*" and "*they stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead*" (14:19). They were so bent upon getting rid of Paul that they went to extremes, got the crowds all hyped up into a riot and attacked Paul, stoning him until he falls to the ground, presumably dead.

You see folks, as you begin living for Jesus, there will be some who are desperate to finish you off and wipe you off the face of the earth, especially in the world today. Oh, it might not be clubbing you all over with stones, but it could be starting rumors, or lies, or conspiracies about you that destroys your credibility and eliminates your ability to witness any more in the Name of Jesus Christ. Satan is working overtime to try to keep the world in darkness and slavery to sin. He does not want anyone to find freedom and eternal life, so he uses those who reject the Truth of Jesus Christ to do his work for them, dividing the people and doing their best to eliminate any witness to the Good News of Christ Jesus.

But don't get weak-kneed about all of this. God knows the situation, and He protects and strengthens those who follow Jesus so that they can do the most amazing things. We are called to stay strong, even in the face of riotous crowds who seek our demise. They are the ones who need to hear the truth the most, so if we cower in fear, or run away, or stop witnessing our faith to them, Satan wins. We must stand strong in our faith, no matter what!

Well after the crowds surrounding Paul leave, thinking that he was dead, the disciples gather, probably to mourn his death. But the Holy Spirit gives life back to him and he is able to return to the city. There seems to be no notice of this by the ones who attacked Paul, because they were probably rejoicing that they had finished him off and gotten rid of him. But Barnabas and Paul leave the next day to go to Derbe.

Listen to how they respond to the attempted murder in Lystra. This is Acts 14:21-28.  
(READ Acts 14:21-28).

Despite the dangers, toils, disagreements, and snares put before them, Paul and Barnabas continue to share the Good News of Jesus. Why would they do that? Because they loved the people enough to give them the message of eternal life! Even though there was the danger of attack, persecution and even death, Paul and Barnabas were so convinced that the world needed to hear the Gospel message about God's love for the world that they continued to share the Salvation of Jesus to the people. And it is recorded, "*they preached the Gospel in that city **and won a large number of disciples***" (Acts 14:21)! Their persistence produced a harvest of people becoming freed from their sins!

People, this is the most important thing we need to learn from this chapter. No matter how hard pressed Paul and Barnabas and the others were by the folks who would not believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, **they did not stop telling others about Him**. There are so many people right around us who have not heard the saving message of God's Salvation through Jesus Christ. Who's going to tell them about this life saving love of God? Don't wait for the pastor to do it all! Don't expect someone else to come along and do it in your stead! God has called each one of you to be the witnesses of Jesus Christ for just such a time as this to reach out to those around you. Don't worry about your not being seminary trained. Don't worry about your not knowing everything in the Bible. Share what you have, and if the people go beyond what you have, invite them to come with you to church so that they can continue to learn about Jesus. Love them enough to tell them about Jesus!

"The parable is told of an old dog that fell into a farmer's well. After assessing the situation, the farmer sympathized with the dog but decided that neither the dog nor the well were

worth the trouble of saving. Instead he planned to bury the old dog in the well and put him out of his misery.

“When the farmer began shoveling, initially the old dog was hysterical. But as the farmer continued shoveling and the dirt hit his back, a thought struck him. It dawned on him that every time a shovel load of dirt landed on his back he should shake it off and step up. This he did blow after blow. "Shake it off and step up, shake it off and step up, shake it off and step up!" he repeated to encourage himself.

“No matter how painful the blows or how distressing the situation seemed, the old dog fought panic and just kept shaking it off and stepping up! It was not long before the dog, battered and exhausted, stepped triumphantly over the wall of that well. What seemed as though it would bury him actually benefited him—all because of the way he handled his adversity.

“If we face our problems and respond to them positively, refusing to give in to panic, bitterness, or self-pity, the adversities that come along to bury us usually have within them the potential to bless us! Forgiveness, faith, prayer, praise, and hope are some of the biblical ways to shake it off and step up out of the wells in which we find ourselves.”<sup>2</sup> And then we will be able to give victory to the Lord for all He has done through us. Don't stop praying. Don't stop telling others about Jesus. God will provide the victory if we remain faithful to Him.

Let's pray. Father, thank You for calling each one of us to do all we can to free those around us from the slavery to sin and death. Give us the boldness of Paul and Barnabas, so that even in the fact of persecution and possible death, we might freely give those around us the love of Jesus Christ. Help us to live and speak and conduct ourselves in such a way that we are living witnesses of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, for “*we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God*” (Acts 14:22). We praise You and thank You in Jesus' Name. **And all God's people said, “AMEN.”**

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<sup>2</sup> (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, [Nashville, TN: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002] pg. 205-206)