

Paul and Barnabas Persevere

(Acts 14:8-28)

Introduction

We have been learning that Paul and Barnabas set out on a missionary journey and the word of the Lord continued to spread. Not everyone received the message of Salvation that they shared, however. As we learned last week, many of the Jews rejected the gospel and attempted to persecute Paul and Barnabas. They endured many hard situations as they tried to spread the word about Jesus.

It's not always easy to tell people about what Jesus came to do for us. But today we will learn that the Holy Spirit empowers all believers to share the Gospel, despite difficulties.

Opening Prayer

Father, thank You that You give us the strength to keep on going even when we face hard situations. Help us to know that the Holy Spirit is with us and can enable us to do all that You have called us to do. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, (3) for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. (James 1:2-3 ESV)

Lesson

God had a special job for Paul and Barnabas. While they were fasting and praying, the Holy Spirit told them to go out from Antioch in Syria to spread the Good News to other parts of the world.

[Teacher trace Paul's first missionary journey on the map as you review.] First, the Holy Spirit sent them to the island of **Cyprus**. They visited the town of **Salamis**, then they went across the entire island to the town of **Paphos** [pronounced "Pay-Foss"]. That's where they met

Bar-Jesus, the Jewish sorcerer and false prophet empowered by Satan, who tried to prevent the governor from believing Paul's message about Jesus.

Next, they went to **Antioch of Pisidia**. Everywhere Paul went he shared the Good News with power and boldness. Many people received Paul's message of salvation and believed in Jesus. Unfortunately, there were some people who refused to believe and some of those unbelieving Jews stirred up trouble for Paul and Barnabas!

Last week we left off in Acts 14, verse 7 when Paul and Barnabas were about to go to the town of Lystra.

Acts 14:8-10

*While they were at **Lystra**, Paul and Barnabas came upon a man with crippled feet. He had been that way from birth, so he had never walked. He was sitting (9) and listening as Paul preached. Looking straight at him, **Paul realized he had faith to be healed.** (10) So Paul called to him in a loud voice, "Stand up!" And the man jumped to his feet and started walking.*

Ask: How do you think Paul knew that the man had faith to be healed? (The Holy Spirit gave Paul discernment.)

It was a miracle that this man could stand on his feet and walk. A *miracle* is something only God can do.

When God performs a miracle, it is to show us His power and point us to Him. God gave Paul the ability to perform this miracle to prove to people his message of salvation was true.

Acts 14:11-13

When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in their local dialect, "These men are gods in human form!" (12) They decided that Barnabas was the Greek god Zeus and that Paul was Hermes, since he was the chief speaker. (13) Now the temple of Zeus was located just outside the town. So the priest of the temple and the crowd brought bulls and wreaths of flowers to the town gates, and they prepared to offer sacrifices to the apostles.

God created people to have a relationship with Him. He is the One and only true God and He alone deserves to be worshiped.

The people who lived in Lystra worshiped false gods or idols. When they saw the crippled man healed, the people thought that Barnabas must be the Greek god Zeus and since Paul was the chief speaker, they thought Paul must be their god Hermes!

So the priest of the temple brought bulls and prepared to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas. When Paul and Barnabas realized what the people were doing, they tried to stop them and told them they were only men like them.

Acts 14:14

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard what was happening, they tore their clothing in dismay and ran out among the people, shouting,

Ask: Why did Paul and Barnabas tear their clothes?

In Bible Times, this was a way to show true sorrow for sin and grief for offending God.

Ask: What do you think might have happened to Paul and Barnabas if they had allowed the people to worship them as if they were gods?

God is highly offended when people give glory to other gods. The first two commandment were:

You shall have no other gods before me. (Exodus 20:3)

You shall not make for yourself a carved image (Exodus 20:4)

The punishment for breaking these laws was death!

Let's see what happened to King Herod when he received worship:

Acts 12:21-23

On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. (22) And the people were shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a man!" (23) Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.

Paul and Barnabas told the people to stop worshiping false gods and turn to the living God.

Acts 14:15-17

*"Friends, why are you doing this? We are merely human beings—just like you! We have come to bring you the Good News that you should turn from these worthless things and turn to **the living God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them.** (16) In the past he permitted all the nations to go their own ways, (17) but he never left them without evidence of himself and his goodness. For instance, **he sends you rain and good crops** and gives you food and joyful hearts."*

Ask: Why did Paul and Barnabas stress to the people that it was the **living** God who had created everything, including the rain?

A statue, or a carved image, is not what created the world, or blesses the fields with rain. The one and only true God is alive and cares for people. He knows each one of us by name; He knows how many hairs are on our heads; He hears and answers our prayers. He is the One who provides what we need to live—the rain and good crops that provide food for us to eat. He is the only One deserving of our worship.

God did not want the people of Lystra to worship His messengers. He wanted them to turn from their sin and worship Him, the one and only true God; the *living* God.

Even when Paul shared God's words with these people, they were having a hard time not worshiping them.

Acts 14:18

But even with these words, Paul and Barnabas could scarcely restrain the people from sacrificing to them.

As Paul and Barnabas served God in Lystra, their enemies were still working to fight against them. Some people from Antioch of Pisidian and Iconium had followed Paul and Barnabas to Lystra. And they were still stirring up trouble with the people. The crowd believed the

lies that Paul and Barnabas' enemies were spreading and turned against Paul and Barnabas.

Acts 14:19

Then some Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowds to their side. They stoned Paul and dragged him out of town, thinking he was dead.

One minute the crowds were worshipping Paul and Barnabas and the next they turned violent against them.

The enemies of Paul thought they had silenced him. They dragged what they thought was his dead body outside the city.

Acts 14:20

But as the believers gathered around him, he got up and went back into the town. The next day he left with Barnabas for Derbe.

Many believers gathered around Paul's body, thinking he was dead. To their surprise, Paul stood up and walked right back into Lystra.

Ask: Wow! Would you have walked back into that town full of people that wanted to kill you?

The Holy Spirit gave Paul courage even when he was persecuted and mistreated by his enemies.

Paul and Barnabas left the next day from Lystra and went to Derbe. Many people in Derbe heard the Good News and believed in Jesus.

When it was time to leave Derbe, Paul and Barnabas knew it was time to return to the believers in Antioch in Syria where they began their missionary journey.

Acts 14:21-22

*After preaching the Good News in **Derbe** and making many disciples, Paul and Barnabas returned to **Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch** of Pisidia, (22) where they strengthened the believers. They encouraged them to*

continue in the faith, reminding them that we must suffer many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God.

At this point Paul and Barnabas were only 90 miles from Paul's home in Tarsus. You might have thought he'd had enough persecution and was ready to go home to the comforts of friends and family, but they knew God still had work for them to do.

They reversed their steps and travelled back to each city where they had shared the Good News. In each of these cities Paul and Barnabas wanted to encourage these new believers to remain faithful to God.

Ask: Why do you think the believers in these cities needed to be encouraged?

Paul and Barnabas knew they would need to keep trusting that the Holy Spirit would give them courage to stay faithful to Jesus when difficulties came. They needed to remember that God would always be with them and enable them to do what He called them to do.

After going through each city, Paul and Barnabas finally arrived back in Antioch of Syria.

Acts 14:27-28

Upon arriving in Antioch, they called the church together and reported everything God had done through them and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles, too. (28) And they stayed there with the believers for a long time.

The believers there must have thanked God for His protection and power as they heard of the dangers that Paul and Barnabas had faced. They must have rejoiced when they heard how many people had come to faith in Jesus.

God guided and protected Paul and Barnabas throughout this missionary journey through all kinds of dangers and trials. And He empowered them to do the missionary work that He had called them to do.

The same Holy Spirit will empower and protect you, too, as you do your best to do whatever God has asked you to do.

Paul believed in the Good News, the gospel. He knew that it was the truth and that God had called him to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth. Paul was **persistent and persevered**. He did not give up. In this chapter of Acts, violent Jews and a stoning did not persuade him to stop telling the gospel. He, literally, got back up again and returned to the cities that had wanted him dead so that he could minister to the disciples and encourage these new believers to be faithful to Jesus.

Paul was humiliated at times, but he continued on because he knew that eternal souls were at stake. He also understood that some people would accept the gospel and others would reject it, but it was his job to tell the gospel to everyone no matter what happened.

Do you have family or friends who need to hear the gospel? Be persistent. Don't give up. Continue to pray for their salvation and ask God to give you the words to say. He will never let you down!

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, I want to have the same persistence that Paul had when sharing the gospel with people. He didn't let anything discourage him or defeat what he knew You had clearly called him to do. Help me to not give up on anyone. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

GAME CENTER

Around the World

Have the students sit in a circle. The first two students pair off against each other. While they stay seated, you ask a question. As soon as you've finished asking the question, they both run up to a bell.

Whoever rings it first attempts to answer the question. The winner moves to the next contestant. The goal is to move as many seats as possible before losing, at which point the losing student sits in the seat of the person who bested him. The game ideally continues until one student makes it "around the world" and gets all the way back to his own seat. Often, though, the game simply ends when time is up, and the person who traveled the farthest wins.

Or use the following questions in another game or discussion.

1. What miracle did God do through Paul in Lystra? (Vs 8. Healed a crippled man.)
2. How do you think Paul knew that the man had faith to be healed? (Vs 9. The Holy Spirit gave Paul discernment.)
3. What is a miracle? (A miracle is something only God can do.)
4. Why were the people worshiping Paul and Barnabas? (Vs 11. They thought they were Zeus and Hermes.)
5. Why did Paul and Barnabas tear their clothes? (Vs 14. This was a sign of mourning.)
6. Why did Paul and Barnabas stress to the people that it was the **living** God who had created everything, including the rain? (Vs 15. The one and only true God is alive and cares for people. He knows each one of us by name.)
7. Why did the people of Lystra stone Paul and drag him out of the city? (Vs 19. Some Jews from Antioch and Iconium followed Paul to Lystra and incited the people of Lystra to stone Paul and drag his body outside the city.)
8. Instead of going straight back to Antioch in Syria where they started their trip, what did Paul and Barnabas do as they travelled home? (Stopped at the cities where they shared the Good News and encouraged the believers.)

9. Why do you think the believers in these cities needed to be encouraged? (They needed to remember that God would always be with them and enable them to do what He called them to do.)
10. When Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch in Syria, what did they share with the believers there? (Vs 27. All that God had done through them.)
11. What motivated Paul to continue to share the Gospel with people even when they refused to believe and even wanted to kill him? (He knew the gospel was the truth and that people would perish without receiving the Lord.)
12. What lessons have you learned from Paul? (To remain persistent; to persevere and not give up even when he was treated harshly.)

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