

FREEDOM'S NEVER FREE

ACTS 14:8-28

Independence Day is characterized by celebration, enjoying the fruits of freedom, often without contemplation - considering the cost of freedom. So too, we will be reminded that completing the spiritual mission can be costly, because freedom's never free.

Last line of the Declaration of Independence:

And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

BIG TRUTH: The Risk is worth the Reward.

Paul & Barnabas have already been thrown out of several cities & heard about assassination plots.

Acts 14:8-10 (NET) ⁸ In Lystra sat a man who could not use his feet, lame from birth, who had never walked. ⁹ This man was listening to Paul as he was speaking. When Paul stared intently at him and saw he had faith to be healed, ¹⁰ he said with a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And the man leaped up and began walking.

In the Roman world, fathers would sometimes leave unwanted babies, especially the disabled, outside to die, discarded like trash.¹ This man was likely devalued by many people, yet Paul demonstrates God's care for him.

If you've read the Bible before, you see Jesus causing the lame to be healed. In the book of Acts we have seen followers of Jesus given the ability to heal (Acts 3:1-8, Acts 8:5-7). The miracles gave the audience reason to listen to the message. But, in this case, there was a different response.

Acts 14:11-12 (NET) ¹¹ So when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!"¹² They began to call Barnabas Zeus and Paul Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.

It's doubtful that Paul & Barnabas knew the **Lycaonian language** and were probably wondering what exactly was being said at this point.

Hermes. Hermes was the messenger/spokesman of all the gods, a son of **Zeus**.

* Note: **Hermeneutics** is the art & skill of biblical interpretation. The term **Hermeneutics** comes from this mythological god of oratory.

Myths were told of how gods would come disguised as men. There was a tradition in Lystra (recorded by the Roman poet Ovid, who died in A.D. 17) that the gods Zeus and Hermes once came to Lystra disguised as men, asking for food and lodging.² When all refused them except one couple, they brought a flood that destroyed everyone else.³

¹ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary & 2: Introduction and 1:1-14:28*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012-2013), 2130.

² John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 326.

³ Keener, 2146.

Determined to not to make that mistake again...

Acts 14:13-17 (NET) ¹³ The priest of the temple of Zeus, located just outside the city, brought bulls and garlands to the city gates; he and the crowds wanted to offer sacrifices to them.¹⁴ But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard about it, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting,¹⁵ "Men, why are you doing these things? We too are men, with human natures just like you! We are proclaiming the good news to you, so that you should **turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything that is in them.**" ¹⁶ In past generations he allowed all the nations to go their own ways, ¹⁷ yet he did not leave himself without a witness by doing good, by giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying you with food and your hearts with joy."

Paul & Barnabas are not dealing with monotheistic (one-God) Jews, but with a polytheistic (many-god) culture. They are confronting these cultural myths, **worthless things**, with the truth - **the living God**, who made all things (**heaven, earth, sea**, and all life within them). This doesn't come from Zeus, Hermes, or 'Mother Nature' - it comes from the ONE TRUE GOD.

It is the ONE TRUE GOD who has provided **rain, fruitful seasons, & food** that satisfies our physical needs.

God has revealed Himself in the kind things he has done for your life too!

- Who provided the food & gave you the ability to laugh? Was this not your CREATOR who has provided for you an untold number of times?
- How many times do we get to the end of the day, bypassing all the simple, daily blessings of God in our lives - food, clothing, housing, family, & friends...this next breath - GIFTS from our Creator!

Acts 14:18-19 (NET) ¹⁸ Even by saying these things, they scarcely persuaded the crowds not to offer sacrifice to them. ¹⁹ But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and after winning the crowds over, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, presuming him to be dead.

Why did these Jews leave Pisidian Antioch & Iconium to come all this way? And how did they win the crowds over? We have no clue. But here we see the fickleness of people who are unwilling to bend their beliefs to fit a biblical worldview.

What a turn around! Paul & Barnabas went from gods worthy of sacrifices to false teachers to be stoned to death! How badly he must have been beaten to be **presumed dead!**

Paul was doing exactly what Jesus said he would.

Acts 9:15-16 (NET) ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, because this man is my chosen instrument **to carry my name before Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel.**" ¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

If we were to be persecuted like THAT, how would WE respond?

BIG TRUTH: *The Risk is worth the Reward.*

Acts 14:20 (NET) ²⁰ But after the disciples had surrounded him, he got up and went back into the city. On the next day he left with Barnabas for Derbe.

Who were these **disciples**? They were evidently some of those saved in Lystra. Maybe Paul's later protegee, Timothy who was from Lystra (Acts 16:1), maybe his mother and grandmother as well (2 Tim. 1:5)? And, what about the lame man who had been healed earlier?

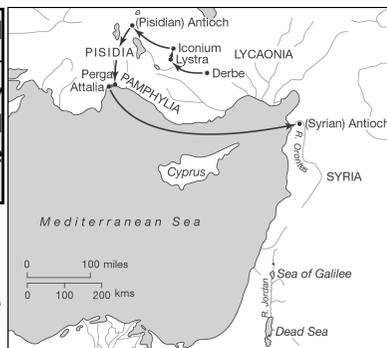
Paul went back into Lystra and left for **Derbe** (a 60 mile journey⁴) on **the next day**. After the beating he took, it would have been much easier just to continue the same direction back toward Paul's home of Tarsus and then back to Syrian Antioch. Instead, they purposely turned back to return the same way they had come.

Acts 14:21-22 (NET) ²¹ After they had proclaimed the good news in that city [Derbe] and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, to Iconium, and to Antioch.²² They strengthened the souls of the disciples and encouraged them to continue in the faith, saying, **"We must enter the kingdom of God through many persecutions."**

Why go through all that? Because they believed...

The Risk is worth the Reward.

And so, too, they reminded their disciples that entering the Kingdom was worth the persecution.



Acts 14:23-28 (NET) ²³ When they had **appointed elders** for them in the various churches, **with prayer and fasting** they entrusted them to the protection of the Lord in whom they had believed.²⁴ Then they passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia,²⁵ and when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.²⁶ From there they **sailed back to Antioch**, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.²⁷ When they arrived and gathered the church together, **they reported all the things God had done with them**, and that **he had opened a door of faith for the Gentiles**.²⁸ So they spent considerable time with the disciples.

Paul & Barnabas likely took many days to train these **elders**, while **praying & fasting** for them before God. And like any godly parent, they chose not to worry about their future, but instead **entrust them to the protection of the Lord in whom they had believed**.

And such ends the first missionary journey of Paul & Barnabas, which could have lasted a year to 2.5 years.⁵ Why take all that time away from their home church? Why journey through distant lands and face untold persecutions?

BIG TRUTH: The Risk is worth the Reward.

"Only one life will soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last."

FEET2FAITH

1. Open & obey the Scriptures.
2. Share your life with another believer.
3. Pray for an opportunity to share your faith in Jesus.

⁴ Keener, 2178.

⁵ Keener, 2191.