Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Qualities of a Great Missionary, Part 2
Scripture: Acts 14:10-21
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Coming to the 14th chapter of Acts, we come to the continuing story of Paul and Barnabas, companions on the first missionary journey to the Gentiles. The good news of Jesus Christ in the Book of Acts started in Jerusalem. It spread to Judea, Samaria, and now the first two missionaries, Paul and Barnabas, and if ever there is a pattern for what a missionary ought to be, here it is. The 14th chapter of Acts narrates their journey through the area known as Galatia. Galatia is not a city; it is a region. And within the region of Galatia, there were many states and many cities and in their travels through Galatia recorded in the 14th chapter, they exhibit the characteristics or the qualities of truly effective missionary and so the title of our two-week study, which began last time, is "The Qualities or Qualifications of a Great Missionary." What really makes somebody effective in the service of Jesus Christ?

And this is not a chapter that lists the principles. It's not a chapter where Paul preaches on the things that make a good missionary. It's a chapter where Paul and Barnabas just in the flow of their ministry make very obvious what are the qualifications and the qualities. It's not a lecture; it's a living illustration. And as I read through this chapter, I was just saying to the Lord a couple of weeks ago, "Lord, how do You want me to put this thing together? What do You want me to say out of this chapter?" And I just kept getting so excited about all of the things that these two guys were exhibiting in their lives that make up effective Christian service, and so I began to write them down and I wrote down at least eight things, eight qualifications, of an effective missionary and they are on exhibit in this chapter and they're on exhibit, I think, for all time, for every church in every age and for everybody who serves Jesus Christ, as the keys to success in the ministry.

Now we started to see them last time and looked at the first three, which I'll mention just quickly by way of review. The first thing that made them effective, the first quality of an effective missionary, was they were ministering spiritual gifts. Now we have made quite a study on the gifts of the Spirit and within a week, I suppose, it's past due date now, a book which I have written on the church, The Body of Christ, to be released by Zondervan Publishing and should be available, and in that is a fully study summarizing many of the things that we've learned here about spiritual gifts and you can follow your own study up in the past with that perhaps as a help to you and so I don't want to spend a lot of time on the subject but let me say this. We do know, having studied the Word of God, that Christians serve most effectively when they serve through the gifts that the Spirit has given them. For me to not have

the gift of teaching and to spend my time teaching doesn't make much sense. For me to have the gift of teaching and not spend my time teaching doesn't make much sense either.

In other words, to have the spiritual gifts and to operate them is basic to any ministry. Now as we saw last week, they had certain spiritual gifts which become very apparent and I think they were characteristic gifts that the Apostles had and I also think that they are the gifts today that for the main belong to evangelists and teaching pastors. We saw four prominent ones. First of all, they both exhibited the gift of preaching or prophesy. Verse 21, "When they preached..." Verse 25, "When they preached..." This is the gift that allows them to proclaim the gospel with results. They had the spiritual gift of preaching; some people don't. And so they had the gift of preaching. They also had the gift of teaching, verse 21, "And when they had taught many, they returned..." So they preached. That's to proclaim the gospel. To teach is to confirm, as verse22 points out. So they followed up their preaching with teaching. Verse 22 also points out they had a third gift, exhorting, "Confirming the souls of the disciples and exhorting them to continue in the faith..." Then a fourth gift that is manifest, verse 23, "When they had ordained elders in every city..." This is the gift of administration.

So I don't know what your gifts are...I know what some of your gifts are, but I don't know all of you enough to know your gifts...but I do know this. Every believer has gifts and gifts are to be ministered and you cannot function in areas where you're not gifted with real success, with ultimate success, as God has designed it, and so we do desire first of all in any kind of effective service to be using people in accordance with their gifts. I suppose that is a problem for much of the work on the mission field and much of the work in the church, that you have people in areas where they're not gifted and you have people who have the gifts who aren't ministering them. Peter said in 1Peter chapter 4 verse 10, "As every man has received the gift, so let him minister the same as good stewards of the multicolored or manifold grace of God." In other words, God has given everybody gifts and they're to be ministered. He said, "As you have received a gift, minister the same." Whatever your gift is, do that. Really effective Christian service then begins with the ministry of your spiritual gifts. You say, "I don't know what mine are." Then you're one step removed from effectively ministering it. You say, "How do I know what my gift is?" Pray about it, ask God about it, be filled with the Spirit and the Spirit of God will automatically do it through you, if you're available. God wants you to know your gift and He wants you to minister.

All right, so they, first of all, minister their gifts. Now we went into this in detail last time so we'll go past it. Then they had a couple of apostolic gifts that don't belong to us today, the gift of miracles in verse 3, signs and wonders, and the gift of healing in verse 10, as Paul said to the lame man, "Stand up. And he leaped and walked." So the Apostles had the basic permanent gifts of preaching, teaching, exhortation, and administration. Now I believe those four gifts belong in the main to the teaching pastors and evangelists today. If a man is in the pulpit, if he's a teaching pastor or an evangelist, those are the gifts that he needs to preach, to follow up his preaching with instruction, to exhort, that is to encourage people to take action that is consistent with their profession, and to

administrate, that is to make the body as a unit in a sense of ruling. Those are the gifts that the Apostles had and they're still gifts today exhibited in the leadership of the church. Whatever your gifts are; if you have the gift of ministry, minister, Romans 12 says. If you have the gift of giving, give. If you have the gift of administration, administrate. Use your gifts. That's basic. Whatever you do in the Christian ministry in terms of success, it is based upon the effectiveness of the ministry of your spiritual gifts.

The second thing we saw in terms of effective ministry was boldness and this we really looked at in verses 1 to 7 as we approached the text in a contextual sense going right through. Verses 1 to 7 told us about the boldness of Paul and Barnabas and the key verse was 3, "A long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord...." We saw that they were bold. They knew there was a brewing persecution. They were now in the town of Iconium, having been thrown out of Antioch. They'd just got thrown from one town to the next through Galatia but they were kicked out of Antioch. They went to Iconium and there, there was a brewing persecution. Verse 2 says, "...Unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren." Well, they knew this was going on, but it never deterred them because they were bold. It never hindered them from preaching. They didn't hesitate to declare what they believed to be true.

And we talked last time about how boldness is the key to success really. Once you begin to minister, Satan is always going to resist you. If you don't have boldness, you quit at that point. If you quit at the point of resistance, you quit before victory, and so boldness helps you to push through. Effective ministry demands boldness and they were bold. The city was polarized. The place was a powder keg. Persecution was brewing and they knew it was going to come any minute and they continued boldly to preach...never hesitated. And incidentally, they were only 18 miles south when they moved to Lystra. And when they got to Lystra in verse 6 they continued to preach, verse 7 says. So even though they were thrown out of Iconium and it got so hot they finally had to leave, they only went 18 miles away and continued to preach, which again is indicative of their courage and their boldness.

All right, the third thing that we saw last time that is so necessary and basic to Christian service is divine power. They didn't do things in their own energy. They did them in the power of God and we saw the illustration of the healing of the lame man in verses 8 to 10, how Paul spoke and he was healed. Now men can't do that, can they? You don't have the ability to do that. Neither did Paul, but God's power flowed through Paul. Now God's power may not flow through you in the area of healing obviously. That's an apostolic gift. Paul had that gift. But God's power flowed through Paul in the area of preaching and teaching and exhorting and administrating as he ordained the elders. The power flow was obvious in the life of Paul and the life of Barnabas. They did everything in the power of God. They didn't do it in their own strength.

Peter said in 1 Peter 4:11, "If you have the gifts of speaking, speak the oracles of God. If you have the gifts of ministry, do it as of the ability which God gives..." You don't ever minister in your own

strength. "...be strong in the Lord, and in the power of...what?...His might," Ephesians 6:10 says. Not in your own strength but in His. We cannot minister effectively in our own energy. Jesus said, "You shall receive power after...what?...the Holy Spirit comes upon you..." And of course in the first chapter of Acts, I mean they had received all the knowledge, all the information, all the promise, all the orders and with all of that information, Jesus says, "Don't take one step until the Holy Spirit gets here. You couldn't do one thing. With all you know, all you've seen, all you've experienced, all the facts, you aren't worth anything without the energy of the Holy Spirit." And so He said, "You wait until the Holy Spirit gets here.

You know, in Ephesians 3:20, it says, "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think, according to the power that works in us." You know that great verse where we can do what we can ask; where we can do what we can think or ask; that we can do all we can think or ask; we can do above all we can think or ask; we can do abundantly above all we can think or ask; we can do exceeding abundantly above all we can think or ask. That's a lot of power! You say, "Where'd he get that power?" You back up a little bit in the chapter and it says this: "I pray God that you would be strengthened by His Spirit in the inner man." In other words, the strength for that is the Spirit in the inner man, you see? The believer cannot do anything in his own strength no matter what he knows and haven't we all tried and found out.

Paul, as he was filled with the Spirit of God, saw power flow in his life, and it flowed unrestricted. Now, this power can't be bought. You remember back in Acts 8 verse 19, Simon came along and he said, "Hey, this is terrific stuff." You know, he had a bag of tricks anyway that he'd probably bought off every magician he'd run into and now he saw the laying on of hands and the arrival of the Holy Spirit and Peter was there and he said, "How much you want for that? Boy, I'll buy that trick. That's a terrific trick." So he offered Peter money and Peter just blew a cork and said, "Your money perish with you for thinking that you could buy the Holy Spirit." You can't buy this power. You say, "Where do you get it?" You get it when you get saved. The moment you're saved, "God has not given you a spirit of fear but a spirit of...what?...power, love and a sound mind." That comes at salvation. God gives you His Holy Spirit but the power doesn't flow until you live under the control of the Holy Spirit, right? Some people are like a full automobile engine, the whole shot, the 426 Hemi or whatever it is, the whole thing with the supercharger, but they haven't found the ignition switch. They don't know how to turn it on. They don't know what to do to get off the pad and that's to learn how to be controlled by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit-filled life.

Well, the Apostle Paul and Barnabas were under the control of the Holy Spirit so that the power just flowed. Everywhere they went, things happened. I mean lame people walked and people got saved and saved people grew and people evangelized and believers came together and the church got organized so it wasn't an organization, it was an organism, and things really happened everywhere they went. Why? The Spirit of God was free to do what He wanted. Paul was up in the middle of his sermon and all of a sudden the Holy Spirit said, "Interrupt your sermon, Paul, and tell that guy to get

up and walk." Paul said, "Get up and walk," and the guy got up and walked. I mean that's the free flow of the power of God. Paul didn't have to go on his knees and spend eight hours in prayer to get ready to pull that one off. Most Christians, in the flow of life, when you realize, you think, "Oh, no. Now I've got an appointment with somebody tomorrow and I might have a chance to share the gospel. Boy, I better get my life straightened out." That's not living in the fullness of the Spirit, see, that's getting ready for the crisis. That's what's known as remedial Christianity. You just shape up at the crisis times. But these guys lived in the fullness of the Spirit. They lived yielded to the control of the Holy Spirit. They lived spiritual lives rather than carnal lives and so when it came time for great things to happen, it was happening all the time because the power flow was unrestricted. That was basic. Now you can go out to the mission field or you can go out to approach some Christian service in your own strength, and I don't care what you know or how clever you are, you're not going to have spiritual results from carnal effort.

Well, ministry of gifts, boldness, divine power...basic. Let's go to the fourth thing and let's pick it up where we left off last time. You take somebody whose gifts are really functioning and who's got boldness and who's got divine power really flowing and you know what the temptation is? It's to come away from that kind of ministry and say, "Hey, Barnabas, boy, did we knock them dead in Lystra. Whoo! Man, did you see what I said to that guy and he did it? Did you see that?" It's very easy to be tempted to be proud, isn't it? And even in the...this is something we all...you go out and you preach and maybe people come forward and receive Jesus Christ and you go away and you think, "Boy, MacArthur. That was really good. You had that one worked out so well and look what happened. Isn't that terrific?" And you just sort of "Hmm, hmm." And somebody comes up to you and says, "My, that was a wonderful sermon" and down under your breath, you say, "I know it." That's a real temptation because, you see, when you're ministering in the Spirit there is going to be results, right? And it's very difficult sometimes to cut yourself off when you see the results and say no to self and to acknowledge totally that it's God's power and so the great temptation that immediately follows effective gifts and boldness and power is pride.

So the very first thing you have right here is a great illustration of humility. And, believe me, people, and I say this with a sense of awe in my own heart and a sense of fear, I know that every really effective ministry is the ministry of humility. It has to be that way. Now humility isn't sort of a mealy-mouthed kind of wishy-washy, spineless kind of rug thing where everybody walks all over you and you go around saying, "I'm nothing. I'm lower than the scum" and all this thing. Humility is simply this. You want to know what humility is? Humility is knowing that everything that happened for the good was God, and everything that happened for the bad was you.

Peter was closing off 1 Peter and giving some final instruction as to why. Listen what he said. "In like manner, you younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility...put on the clothes of humility; be dressed in humility...for God resists the proud." I mean if you want to fight God, that's your prerogative but God fights proud people. But

what does he do for the humble? "He giveth...what?...grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may...what?...exalt you in due time." Get your perspective right. Over in James 4:6 and 10, He says exactly the same thing, "...God resists the proud, gives grace to the humble... Humble yourselves before the Lord and in the right time, He'll lift you up." Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 18:4? He looked around at His disciples and He said, "Whosoever shall become as this little child, the same shall become the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Humility.

Well, immediately after great success, Satan comes and hits you with pride, and he hits Paul and Barnabas between the eyes with the problem of pride. Watch how this happens and it really is a strange incident. They're in Lystra. They've been preaching away. This guy just stood up and walked and the crowd is absolutely flabbergasted. I mean the guy has been...he has been crippled from birth and he's jumping around and they're just completely flabbergasted and so immediately here comes the temptation. Watch verse 11, "And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices...that's eros tense; they all started crying one great big yell, just shocked them...saying in the speech of Lycaonian...Paul and Barnabas couldn't understand them; listen what they said...the gods are come down to us in the likeness of men." See? The gods are here. Did you see what they did? You say, "Where did they ever get the idea?" They had a tradition in Lystra, interesting one. There was an old traditional story that had hung around Lystra for many years. This was it. One time, Zeus and Hermes, two gods, came to earth in disguise, incognito, and they came to the town of Lystra, which was an outpost Roman colony, way out Asia Minor, and they came to Lystra and they asked for hospitality, a place to stay and something to eat, and everybody refused them, everybody in town but two people: an old man named Philemon and his wife Baucis. They took in the gods in disguise not knowing they were anything but strangers, fed them, kept them, so forth. The result? The whole town of Lystra was wiped out by those two gods. They killed everybody. But Philemon and Baucis were made the guardians of a splendid temple outside the city and when they died, they had the honor of being turned into two great trees. Now that's the story of Philemon and Baucis, but, you see, that was in the tradition of Lystra.

Now all of a sudden, here come two guys and they pull off that miracle and immediately everybody says, "Uh-oh, Zeus and Hermes are back. We're not going to blow it this time." Verse 12, "They called Barnabas Jupiter...and that is simply the Latin for Zeus...and they called Paul Mercury...which is the Latin for Hermes...because he was the chief speaker." They said, "They're here." They weren't going to blow it again. Well, you know, this is an interesting temptation. They had seen this healing and they were determined not to make the same mistakes and ignore the gods again and so they thought...well, Barnabas must have been a big, handsome kind of guy because Zeus was the king of all gods and they said Barnabas is Zeus. He must have been something. And Paul, as we know, was a little bald-headed, kind of bandy-legged little guy and they called him Mercury, which is Hermes, and that was the god of speech, the god who invented speech, and since Paul was always the one doing the talking, they called him that. But that was the same two gods that had visited them earlier

supposedly in their tradition. Of course those two gods don't exist. It was all just in their idolatry.

But anyway, they started a big celebration and, of course, at this point, Paul and Barnabas don't know what's going on. The Spirit puts a footnote in there "...saying in the speech of Lycaonia...." because Paul and Barnabas couldn't speak Lycaonian and they were probably wondering, "What is going on here?" And they didn't really know anybody around and so it was kind of a strange thing. The place went wild. They were babbling in their native tongues and Paul and Barnabas apparently hung around and saw what was going on and they were tempted, I'm sure, and I'm sure this was the approach of Satan. You could rationalize this. You could say...Paul could have turned to Barnabas and said, "Barn, you know, if we play this right, we could really be something in this town and we could get ourselves in a position to be heard." They could have rationalized. "Just think if we get elevated and glorified and exalted and really become something, just think, we can preach the gospel. What a terrific opportunity. Boy, this is great." But Paul didn't think...Paul was too smart for that. Satan is so subtle. The town before, he wanted to kill them. This time, he wants to make them a god, see. His approach runs the gamut. If persecution isn't successful, he'll exalt you. There's two things that a Christian has to learn to handle: persecution and pride, right? Tough; both ends of the spectrum...tough. Sometimes pride is more devastating than persecution. Pride is a disaster. If Paul and Barnabas had succumbed to this, it would have been the end of them.

I remember when I was in Minneapolis one time not too long ago and I was speaking for a week at a very well-known church, the First Covenant Church of Minneapolis, and we were having meetings there that were meetings with really young people part of the time and the whole church at other times and I was the preacher and the teacher and they had invited some music group to come and I didn't know anything about it. Of course, they invited me to preach and teach what I wanted and I usually take that opportunity, didn't put any strings on it, and I didn't know they were going to have this group. But they had a musical group for the young people and I have certain preferences about music and I did not like this at all. It had a lot of stuff I didn't like. It had a whole bunch of dancing and stuff in it and I just didn't like it. So they did a whole...and some of the...I know some of the older people in the church thought the Tribulation had arrived. You know, I mean they just...I mean it was in the auditorium and, oh, it was something, you know, and whew, but anyway, some of these dear saints turned off their hearing aides. There was no question about it.

But I'll never forget after...it was pure entertainment. It had no redeeming value at all as far as I could see. It was absolutely pure entertainment with no spiritual content at all, and so one night we were having a barbecue before the meeting and I just sat down with the kids and I said, "I'd just like to ask you a question." I said, "What are your desires? What are you trying to do with what you're doing?" And I'll never forget what this guy said to me, the leader. He said, "Well, I'll be real honest with you." He said, "We're trying to make it big in the entertainment world and we see the church as a stepping stone." And that was his statement and I didn't say anything and he qualified it further by saying, "If we can get established and get some good rehearsals and make a little money to buy some

equipment, we can bounce off into the nightclub circuit and really do it up." And then I asked him, "Is that why you leave every night just before I speak? Where have you been going?" And they'd been going over to some concert place to hear some rock groups and so they talked for about a half an hour about this and then one kid said, "Yeah and if we get really big in the nightclubs then we can witness for Christ."

And so finally, after listening to them, I said...and I'm not a prophet or the son of a prophet but I said it anyway. I said, "I predict that in less than six months your group won't even exist because God can't honor that." That was the last engagement they ever had in Minneapolis. It was over. It didn't take God six months. It didn't take him six days. The whole thing fell apart. It doesn't exist anymore. You see, when you get to thinking that what you want is exaltation and some kind of exaltation is going to give you an avenue for the gospel, you're not kidding God or yourself. When a person seeks to be glorified in the world's eyes, that's a disaster. You don't need to be popular in the world to be successful with God. All you need is the energy of the Holy Spirit, right? They always say, "Well, you know, so if you were an ex-so-and-so or you can get up and you were some famous thing and you became a believer, oh, think of..." Wait a minute. The Holy Spirit does what He wants to do through the vessels He has by the way they're spiritually gifted and by their sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. I don't care if it's Joe Schmow from nowhere. Believe me. Paul and Barnabas tore city after city apart and they weren't anything special in the world's eyes.

Well, anyway, pride is a disaster and they could have fallen at this point, been lifted up and exalted. Well, they didn't even know what was going on by this time. Verse 13 says, "The priests...or the priest; some manuscripts have a plural there...the priests or the priest of Jupiter, whose temple was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates." Here comes oxen; they got flowers around their necks. You say, "What are they going to do?" They're going to make sacrifices. To who? Paul and Barnabas and Paul and Barnabas by this time had probably gone back to wherever they're staying. They don't know what's going on here. Boy, I never saw a city in such turmoil. Wonder what they're talking about? And the priests have decided this is in fact the gods, Zeus and Hermes, and they're going to sacrifice oxen.

Well, verse 14, they finally found out what was going on. "Which when the Apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they tore their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, and saying, 'Sirs, what are you doing?'" Now stop there. Outside the city was the temple to Zeus and if the gods had descended, the gods were to be honored, and so they had to get the oxen, get them ready for sacrifice. We're going to give offerings to Paul and Barnabas. Well, when they discovered that the town was planning a ceremony to honor them as gods, they really got upset. I mean a holiday spirit had gripped the city, and the sacrificial oxen were being paraded through with garlands around their necks, and whatever kind of stuff went on to attend the pagan spree was going on and all of a sudden somebody got the word to Paul and Barnabas and they couldn't believe it. Not having understood Lycaonian up to this point, they rushed back into the marketplace and they yelled, "What are you

doing?" I like that. They didn't want anything from the world at all. They didn't want any of the world's fame. They didn't want to be lifted up as gods. You know what? They saw that as blasphemy. How do you know that? Because look what Paul and Barnabas did. When they heard of it, they did...what?...verse 14. They tore...what?...their clothes. You say what does that mean? That was a sign, and that was a Jewish thing, a very Jewish thing. That was a sign of desecration. That was a token that something was blasphemous.

Back in Matthew 26, this is such a...just a powerful scene. Jesus is before Caiaphas, who was a crumb from the word go, and Jesus didn't say anything and they kept asking Him questions "...and like a lamb before his shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth," as Isaiah put it, and finally the high priest said, "...I adjure Thee by the living God...Matthew 26:63...tell us whether You are the Messiah, the Son of God." Boy, he was really uptight. "Jesus saith unto him, 'You said it.'" And then Jesus says this, "...nevertheless, I say unto you, hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." Well, that just blew the lid off Caiaphas. Verse 65 says, "Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, 'He hath spoken blasphemy.'" To blaspheme God, to desecrate God, was a horrible thing and Jews customarily tore their clothes in horror when it was done and that's exactly what Paul and Barnabas did here. Only while Caiaphas did it in stupidity, Paul and Barnabas did it correctly. They tore their clothes and said, "Stop this desecration. We don't want to be exalted. We don't want to be deified."

Just a footnote. It's a great way to tell a false teacher. Do you know how to tell a false teacher? He wants to be exalted and deified. Inevitably, a false prophet wants to build a cult around himself that exalts him and you see them all the time. Jesus said that. He said there's a test. In John 7 verse 18, I'll just read it to you. Listen. Of course, they were saying "Well, why should we believe You, Jesus? I mean give us a reason. You've come making these claims. What gives You the right to do that and what makes us believe it?" This is what He said, verse 18 of John 7: "He that speaketh of himself seeks his own glory; but He that seeks His glory that sent Him, the same is true...." You want to know how you can tell a true prophet from God? Whose glory does he seek? God's. You know how you can tell a false prophet? Whose glory does he seek? His own. And you can believe it. You see them from time to time on the television and you see them from time to time in city and their picture is in the paper and you can always tell a false prophet because it's a continual exaltation of himself, and you can always tell a true prophet because he always gives glory to God. Jesus said, "That's why you ought to know who I am. I've never asked for anything for Myself. I've continually given glory to God." Paul and Barnabas were true prophets. You know how we know that? They didn't want any glory. Boy, they could have had it. That would have been the false prophet's ultimate dream, to be mistaken for God. Not them.

Well, old Paul started to talk and they cried out in verse15 saying, "Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you." In other words, he doesn't mean here that we're lustful, evil men; he means "We feel the same things you do. We feel pain, and hunger, and thirst and we suffer

sickness and we die. We're just mortal. What are you doing all this for? We're just plain old, everyday, common, ordinary human beings." And then he goes further. "...and we preach unto you that you should turn from these vanities unto the living God." We preach...euangelizo...we preach the good news. We've been preaching to you the good news to turn from these vanities. That word "vanity" is such an interesting word. Paul calls their whole idol worship vanity. You know what it literally means? "No things." You know who they worshiped? No things. They worshiped nothing! He says, "Turn from the nothing." Can you imagine? That's mataion. That's what idolatry is; it's worshiping nothing. You can't imagine the heathen bowing down and saying, "Oh, nothing. Vain, worthless, useless nothing." Paul says, "We've been telling you the good news. Stop worshiping no things and turn to the...what?...the living God." That's the message we've been...we've been giving you that message. Cut this stuff out, this stupid idolatrous nothingness. Vanity, that means worthless, useless nothing. Anybody who doesn't worship God worships nothing. Whatever he substitutes for God, which is usually self. Turn to the living God as opposed to the dead nothings. Which God? Well, he didn't say the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They weren't Jews. He says, "The God who made heaven and earth and the sea and all things that are in them."

You say, "A lot of good that does. They don't know that God." Yes they do. You say, "What do you mean, they do?" Every man knows that God. You say, "You mean that every man knows the God who made the world?" Well, I didn't say that; Paul did in Romans 1. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...watch this...who hold the truth in unrighteousness." You say, "Well, they don't know God." Verse 19, "...because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shown it unto them." And in addition to the inside, "...the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen..." They know it from inside, they know it from what they can see "so that they are without...what?...excuse." No man could say, "I don't know God." Only can a man say, "I reject the God whose knowledge is innate." And that's exactly what happened in Romans chapter1 in verse 28, "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them up to a reprobate mind, to do the things which were unseemly, being filled with unrighteousness." Sure, every man born into the world has the knowledge of God. Paul said, "Turn from the no things to the God you know to be, the God of creation, the God of conscience, the God who...verse16...in time past allowed all nations to walk in their own ways." What does he mean by that? God didn't give them any written law. God didn't give them any ceremonial law. God didn't give them any specific religious law.

You say, "Well, then they didn't have anything." Oh, yes, they did. Verse 17, "Nevertheless, He left not Himself without witness." Well, if they didn't have a ceremonial law and they didn't have a written law, religious law, what did they have? God gave a witness. What was it? I love this: "...in that He did good, and gave rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." You know what that's known as? Providence. They're not excusable. You say, "But they didn't have any written law." That's all right. They had the law written in their hearts and they had the visible creation and the providence of God. Any man in this world is responsible for the knowledge of God, for God

has written it in his conscience, God has revealed it in the creation, and God continues to reveal it in providence.

In verse 16, God did allow them to walk in their own ways. God...according to Acts 17:30, "...the time of this ignorance God overlooked..." In other words, God did not fully pour out judgment on the Gentile nations because they did not have the same revelation Israel had and the principle is to whom much is given...what?...much is required. So all through the Old Testament, we see Israel being judged. Now sometimes we see Gentile nations being judged, but in a sense, God held His judgment back somewhat. But I like Acts 17:30. "Since Christ," he says, "God now commands all men everywhere to...what?...to repent." And so Paul says, "The God that you know to be, the God that conscience tells you to be, that creation tells you to be, that providence tells you to be, that God that you know about." And he just...he really...that's a sermon on faith. He really believed in his heart that they did know the true God and I believe it. You say, "But they didn't have the written law." Yeah, well, look at Romans 2. Listen to this, verse 13, "For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers." Now watch, verse 14, "For when the heathen who have not the law do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law are a law unto themselves."

You know that a heathen, not having the written law, can still do the things in the law? You say, "How?" Verse 15, "They show the work of the law written in their...what?...hearts, their conscience bearing witness." Israel had a codified law written on tables of stone and a sophisticated law taken down by Moses, and they ended up in sin. It didn't do them a bit of good to have the law; they didn't obey it. Some Gentiles didn't have the written law, and they lived up to the conscience that God had placed within them. They saw God in creation, in conscience, and in providence and Paul is talking to them and you know what happened? He reaped some of those ripe ones, some of those Gentiles like Cornelius, who had lived up to that.

So he preached a sermon, a sermon to Gentiles. It's the first sample of one of Paul's Gentile sermons and I'm sure it's only a portion of it again. You say, "Well, what happened in result of the sermon?" Verse 18, "And with these sayings scarce...or hardly or with great difficulty...restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them." It worked. The ceremony came to a screeching halt; reluctantly, hard to do, but they did it. Barely, but they did it. So Paul had preached. He had already preached in that town the gospel and this was just added to that to tie it all together. What did Paul and Barnabas do, people? They disclaimed any honor, any glory for themselves. They didn't want any. Believe me, that is a characteristic of effective service to Christ. It has to be there.

I always think about a guy that I always love and he's kind of a strange guy, lived out there in the wilds and wore a modified Tarzan suit and ate grasshoppers and his name is John the Baptist, and John 1:6 says, "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not the Light, but was sent to bear witness of the Light." Who was the Light? Jesus. Old John came along in verse 15

of John 1, "...This was He of whom I spoke...pointing to Jesus...He comes after me and He is preferred before me." John was humble. You know what Jesus said about John? The greatest man who ever lived, Matthew 11:11. "Among them that are born of women there has never been a greater than John the Baptist." Greatest man that ever lived...humility...humility.

Over in chapter 3, John's time was over and Jesus had arrived. What are you going to do with an old introductory prophet? Well, you can behead them and take them up to glory and that's exactly what happened to John. I mean he was through so the Lord chose that he be a martyr, but I love his spirit. He says in verse 28, "You yourselves bear witness that I said I am not the Christ." Some of his disciples were saying, "John, we love you, brother. We've been following you around in this deal. What happens now? I mean you're shifting gears. Everybody is going over to Messiah. What about poor old you, John?" He said, "I told you I wasn't the Messiah to begin with, didn't I?" I mean "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, stands and hears him and rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. This is my joy therefore is fulfilled." John says, "I'm like the best man at a wedding. I mean I love the guy that's getting married. He's my buddy and he's going to marry the bride and when the wedding comes and the bridegroom takes the bride, I'm happy for my friend. This is my joy; it's fulfilled." John says, "I don't want anything for myself. I'm just happy that the bridegroom and the bride are getting together." Then he says this, "He must increase...what?...but I must decrease." That's humility. John had been the greatest prophet that ever lived, and he was ready to go whew. Boy, that takes some kind of character, to be at the top and just fade into prison. Whew, off with the head and it's over and with John, it's fine. The Lord's done with me. That's good...humility.

Well, Paul and Barnabas had it. They didn't want any of the world's accolades. What were the tremendous characteristics then? First of all, a ministry of gifts, boldness, power, and humility. One more, and just a brief one, and we'll quit...persistence. This is the "never say die" attitude. Oh, do I like this one. That's a great quality. Well, they apparently hung around Lystra for awhile. There was a little break and then verse 19 says, "And there came there certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium." Now they had been kicked out of both those towns and you can imagine when these Jews arrived in Lystra and found them at it again that they were really upset. So they "...persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead." They were afraid of the Roman law even though it was a frontier town to be sure. There was enough Roman law to scare them, so they thought Paul was dead after they'd crushed him with stones and, incidentally, it indicates that the Jewish antagonists had brought about the execution because Gentiles didn't stone people. They threw him off a little ledge and just crushed him with stones and thinking he was dead, they hauled him out to the dump and threw him in, hoping nobody would discover his body. Well, you say, "That's enough to discourage anybody in the ministry." Getting stoned like that, there's no question about it.

Isn't it an interesting thing how fast the fickle crowd changes? I mean the same bunch that threw the rocks at him was the same bunch that was saying these are gods. How soon they forgot the miracle, right? Oh, the fickle crowd, the fickle world. Disillusioned fanatics are easily led into the contradictory action. Disillusioned people grow sullen and sour, and usually they take out their resentments on the one who spoiled their illusion. So some skilled rabble-rousers appeared and whipped the crowd into a frenzy and the mindless mob was thirsty for blood and they stoned Paul. It was mob violence. You can imagine the picture just in your minds of a whole mob surging through town and screaming and yelling and grabbing Paul, and smashing him to the ground and just pounding rocks on him and then they hauled his body out and threw it in the dump. But I just love verse 20, "Nevertheless, as the disciples stood round about him..." Stop there. What disciples? How many guys went into that town? Paul and Barnabas. Where did the disciples come from? Fruitful ministry. There were disciples there. Do you know I know who three of them were? You say, "There's no names there." Yeah, but the names come later...Lois, Eunice...who's the third one?...Timothy. They were saved out of that community. And in fact they grew.

Verse 1 in chapter 16 says that, "Timothy, the son of a certain woman, who was a Jewess, and believed; his father was a Greek. And Timothy was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium" and old Timothy became a dear and precious friend to Paul, and to all of us throughout all the years of the church since then. There were some disciples who stood around him. Well, they were about to see something funny, something exciting. "As the disciples stood around about him, he rose up." You say, "Was that a miracle?" I think so. I don't know what else you'd call it. It certainly was a miracle. But you know what I just love? The next statement: "And he came into the city." If I was writing this as a story, a fictitious, I would say he rose up and headed for the hills, where they nursed his wounds and he escaped. He got up and went back into town. That is persistence. He was not finished yet. The slight interruption had only delayed him a matter of a few hours and he had apparently communicated to these disciples certain courage or they wouldn't have been standing out there with him either. So he came into the city. Oh, he was so persistent.

And then to add to that...you imagine this? "...and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe." You say, "Now, anybody knows he needed a couple of days to recover." Not Paul. The next day; no time to waste. Barnabas couldn't believe it probably. "Paul, you must be out of your mind. You've just been stoned yesterday. Why don't you take a week and rest?" It's a 30-mile hike to Derbe and they went the next day. Now that's what you call persistence. You say, "Oh, yeah, but he'll rest when he gets to Derbe." Verse 21, "And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and taught many, they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch." He didn't rest at all. Well, there was a little rest. Derbe was the first city they'd been to they hadn't started a riot, so God did give him a little bit of a rest. But he didn't rest. There's something wonderful about that. Paul never lost a day. I just think it's so important that the Holy Spirit says "on the next day." If the Holy Spirit didn't say "the next day" there, we would assume that Paul rested. The next day, he went to Derbe.

Ephesians 5:15 and 16 just says it. "See that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise..." You say, "Well, yeah, it's good to walk wise. How do wise people walk?" Listen to the next verse, "...redeeming the time." Wise people know how to maximize time. In Colossians 4:5, it similarly says...and there's much similarity between Ephesians and Colossians..."Walk in wisdom toward them that are outside...unsaved people...redeeming the time." Remember Psalm 90? "Lord, teach us to number our days and so apply our hearts unto wisdom." People, I really believe that spiritual maturity has a lot to do with how you use your time. "To redeem" is in the middle voice there in Ephesians and middle voice means "buy up for your own profit, buy up for your own advantage, buy up for yourself, time." Not chronos, clock time, but kairos, opportunity. Buy up opportunity. We call a man a fool who throws away money. The Bible calls a man a greater fool who throws away time. Time, persistence. Paul was stoned. He was up, back in town, finish the job.

I've known people who've said, "I think I'd like to teach a class or do that." And they do it and "I don't like the way the superintendent looked at me. I'm going to quit. I can't come at that hour. I can't...don't have..." We have all these people, "We're going to offer a special thing," and everybody comes and six weeks later when it's finished...hmmm...attrition. There's a few faithful. What happens to persistence? Where is that "never say die" commitment that says, "No matter what happens, I believe God wants me here. I'm going to go against all odds." Melanchthon, who was a great reformer, all his ministry, kept records...get this...records every day of lost time not spent for the Lord. Boy, a little of that would shape you up. He kept records. Most of us don't keep records because we wouldn't dare. What do you do with your time? Are you persistent? Are you redeeming and buying up every kairos, every opportunity? Make it matter; make it count.

Well, Paul never got side-tracked, never got distracted. He just redeemed every opportunity. It didn't matter if he was beaten within an inch of his life. They thought he was dead; that's how bad off he was. Didn't stop him. You say, "Well, how could he do it? I mean everybody needs a rest. How could he do that?" I'll tell you how. Philippians 4, here's his secret. You ready for this? Philippians 4:11, "Not for that I speak in respect of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, in this to be discontent...oh, content...I know how to be abased. I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I am instructed to be full and to be hungry, to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Nothing daunted him; he was persistent. Boy, this is a great quality in Christian service, a great quality.

There they are: five thrilling features of the life of two missionaries...spiritual gifts, boldness, divine power, humility and persistence. Three more next week. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You that You've given us again illustrations of how we are to live for You and with effect. I thank You, Father, for the lives of these two beloved brothers in Christ. Thank You that the principles haven't changed and the Spirit hasn't changed, so the power is still there. Father, You

require no less of us than You did of them. Father, we would pray even this morning that we would have learned well, not just in our heads but in our hearts, the truths that the Spirit has taught us. Help us to serve You with the same kind of commitment and the same energy and with the same undaunted, undistracted, courageous dedication that these two beloved men did. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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