

The Church's Mission

Acts 14

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Here's my introduction (I wanted you to look at the screen): The mission of the church is missions, and the mission of missions is the church. I wanted to put that on the screen so that you could not only hear it but see it. The mission of the church is missions, and the mission of missions is the church.

In the book of Acts we're following Paul on his first missionary journey. What is the missionary journey all about? Simply stated, it's about planting churches. How do we plant churches? By preaching the gospel. The pattern is always the same. Listen to me very carefully. First, they went into a town and preached the gospel of Jesus Christ. We never, ever forget about that. That's the calling of the church. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." When the church stops preaching the gospel, we are no longer the church; and what happens is, there is division. Wherever the gospel is preached, people are divided. There are those who believe; there are those who do not believe. There are those who receive Christ; there are those who reject Christ. There are those who put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ and are saved; there are those that reject Jesus Christ and are lost. There's the preaching, there's the division, and it was always followed by persecution or opposition. Wherever the gospel is preached, people will oppose the good news; and then it would result in the church's growth.

I didn't just say that to introduce the study, it's a pattern we're going to see (tonight, we see it in the book of Acts), and it has been throughout the history of the church. The gospel is preached, there is division, then persecution, then growth. The church has never been hindered by opposition or persecution. Jesus said, "I will build my church; and the gates of hell," hades, "shall not prevail against it." The church is going to continue to grow right up until the time that Jesus comes back to rapture His bride and take us home to heaven.

As we go through this chapter tonight on the church's mission, I'm going to give you six key words to cover the divisions of this chapter. You might want to write them down. The first is the word "division," verses 1-7. It says, "And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews," Luke's speaking here about Barnabas and Paul. Barnabas and Paul are now coming into the town of Iconium, "and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed," so there is the preaching of the gospel. When it says, "so spake they" it speaks of the fact that they spoke powerfully and convincingly. "But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. 3 Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace," a reference to the gospel, the Word of God, "and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. 4 But the multitude of the city was divided," there's that theme of verses 1-7, the word "division" or "divided," "and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. 5 And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles,

and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them,” that is, Paul and Barnabas, “They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about,” and again, verse 7, notice it says, “And there they preached the gospel.” There’s no synagogue mentioned here because they’re in Gentile territory, so they go on the outside city and preach the gospel.

Can I have my map again up on the screen really quickly for just a moment? This is the map of the first missionary journey. They started in Antioch of Syria, traveled westward to the island of Cyprus, and came to Salamis. They went across the island of Paphos and sailed up to Attalia, Pamphylia, and Perga. They traveled into Antioch and went to Iconium; they then go to Lystra and Derbe. In our Bible, (leave the map up there for just a moment) notice verse 1, “And it came to pass in Iconium,” so now they have traveled from Antioch to Iconium. Then, they’re going to go to Lystra (at the end of this section, verses 6-7), and down into Derbe. So, “it came to pass,” verse 1, that they came to “Iconium.” It was just a short distance there from Antioch, and “they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews,” there’s still a synagogue, where their normal approach was to go into the synagogue and speak.

Notice, they “spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.” There were both Jews and Gentiles that heard Paul preach in this synagogue, but the phrase I want to point out is in verse 1 where it says, “so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.” That little phrase “so spake” indicates that Paul spoke with authority, with power, and that he spoke convincingly. It wasn’t just kind of like a nice little talk. He was powerfully, persuasively, and very clearly convincing them, and the Spirit of God was convicting them, that Jesus was the Messiah. They were turning to and believing in Jesus, but the division ensues. “But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.” They were persecuting the apostles, and “Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace.” Why is the message here referred to as the “word of his grace?” Because the gospel centers on the grace of God. The gospel is all about the grace of God—that we’re saved by grace not by works, not by our own good efforts or by our own deeds, it’s the Word of God’s grace.

Notice that God allowed them to perform miracles in verse 3. It says, “signs and wonders to be done by their hands.” The Apostle Paul and Barnabas were preaching and God was using them to bring about miracles. I want you to notice the sequential order of this. It’s so very important. There’s a movement today, (it’s not new, it’s been around a while. There’s really nothing new under the sun. All of these movements kind of cycle through the church over the years) that is, in missionary work our focus ought to be miracles. We should go out and pray for people to be healed. If they’re healed, we’ll get their attention. Then we can share the gospel with them, but the order in the Bible isn’t that. The order in the Bible is always that they preached the Word and then God confirmed the Word that was preached with the miracles and the signs which followed. I think it’s important that you have it in that order.

We’re going to see tonight in this chapter that miracles do not always produce a genuine or

authentic or a real faith. People can see a miracle, and that's not necessarily going to bring about a real, lasting change or a conviction or true repentance. The Bible says, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Literally, that's the word preached about Jesus or the gospel message. When they hear the good news, then they respond in faith and believe. God confirms that Word, that these are messengers that have come from Me, by these signs and wonders. The word "signs" indicates that the miracle points to who Jesus Christ truly is. It's a sign pointing to something. The word "wonders" indicates the effect that it had on those who saw the miracle that was performed.

Notice in verse 4, "But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles." Jesus said it like this, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword...a man's foes shall be they of his own household," a husband against a wife, a wife against the husband, parents against the children, the child against the parents. Jesus went on to say that if we don't love Him more than father and mother that we're not fit to even be one of His disciples. You know, when you choose to follow Jesus Christ, guess what? There will be a division. People will either support or reject you as a follower of Jesus.

I remember when I gave my life to Jesus, all of my friends no longer wanted to be my friends because I was now a Jesus freak, you know. I wasn't wanting to hang out and party and do drugs and the things they were wanting to do and pursue. It was kind of like, "I'm a Christian now. I don't want to talk like that. I don't want to think like that. I don't want to go to those places. I don't want to do those things." It's like, "John, you're no fun anymore," right? "What's happened to you?" "Well, I've come to know Jesus. I've been forgiven. I have eternal life, and I want to read the Bible. You need Jesus, too." I started to preach to them. As I preached to them, maybe a few believed and some of them didn't believe but there was division. You either walk a lonely road with Jesus, or you're without Him in the crowd—I chose to walk a lonely road with Jesus. God had to give me a whole bunch of new friends—Christian friends. Now, before I was a Christian, I thought Christians were weird. Who wants to hang out with Christians? What do they do for fun? Read the Bible and pray. How boring is that? Then, I became a Christian. I was one of them, so I liked them. It's just kind of weird how God changes your heart. What are you doing on Wednesday night in church, you know? Your neighbors see you leave with your Bibles, get in the car and think, Where are they going on Wednesday night? To church. No normal human being goes to church on Wednesday night. You find out that when you choose to follow Jesus Christ that there's division.

Maybe you're married and you become a Christian. Your spouse does not believe in Jesus Christ. This is a common scenario. That's why I really encourage you to get saved at an early age and marry only in the Lord. Amen? Sometimes you wait later and get married, and you marry out of God's will. Then, you get saved and your spouse doesn't come along. It's hard. It's difficult. Not a week goes by but what we pray with people from our church, "My husband's not a Christian, and he hassles me. He doesn't want me to read the Bible to the kids. He doesn't want me to come to church. He doesn't want me to tell them about Jesus." Maybe, "My wife isn't a Christian, and she doesn't support what I do in following Christ." There's a division

in your home, and that sword comes into your home. You have to make a decision, am I going to side with Jesus or am I going to follow the crowd? Am I going to follow Jesus or am I going to capitulate? That doesn't mean when you get saved and you're married and your spouse doesn't get saved you say, "You're a heathen. I want to leave you. You're not a Christian. I'm going to go to Revival and find a real cute Christian to marry," you know. "One with a real nice Bible or something." I've met people like that. "Pastor Miller, I got saved now and my husband's a heathen. Can I divorce him and marry one of these cute guys at Revival?" Uh, no. You can't do that.

Paul says in Corinthians that if you have an unbelieving spouse and they're pleased to dwell with you, then you're not to depart. You're not to leave them. You're not to get a divorce. He goes on to actually say, "...else were your children unclean; but now are they holy." What he's saying is that you as a believer have a sanctifying affect on your children and on other family members in that home as well as your unbelieving spouse. Whether it's a husband or wife, if they're pleased to dwell with you, you're not to get a divorce just because now you're a Christian and they're a heathen and they've got cooties and you want out. It doesn't work that way. When the Bible tells you as a wife to submit to your husband, it doesn't say only as he is a Christian. You're to do it as unto the Lord, but even if he's not a Christian, unless he tells you to do something that is unscriptural or unbiblical or ungodly or against the law, you're to be submitted to your husband. You're to pray for him and to be patient. There's been a lot of men that have come to Christ because their wives have been a witness and a testimony in the home. They've been patient, submissive, loving, and prayed for their heathen husband. I mean, you've just gotta be patient and trust God to change their hearts. We have men in the church that are married to wives that aren't believers. It's hard for them, and they are praying for their wives. You need to be patient and love, support, and encourage her. As even Christ loved the church, give yourself to encourage your wife and pray that God will use you in that marriage. Don't give up. The division does come, but we need to trust the Lord to work to make us a testimony to our spouse.

Verse 5, "And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them," they were going to stone Paul and Barnabas, so they departed. Was this a bad thing? No. It was a smart thing. The Lord was closing the doors. There was opposition. It was time for them to move on. Jesus said if someone rejects the gospel, you shake the dust off your feet and move to the next town. I showed it to you on the map just a minute ago. They went to Lystra and Derbe, which is about 30-40 miles to the southeast. They went to Lystra and Derbe which are the areas of Laodicea, and it says "unto the region that lieth round about: And there they preached the gospel," of Christ. There's always going to be division when the gospel's preached.

The second division, verses 8-10, I would use the word "deliverance." Write down the word "deliverance." First we have the "division," and now we have the "deliverance." It says, "And there sat a certain man at Lystra," so they come now to Lystra, "impotent in his feet," he was crippled, "being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: 9 The same heard Paul speak," so Paul is out in public now speaking. I believe that it involved telling people or

sharing the gospel of Christ, “who steadfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed,” and so he said, Paul did, to this crippled man, “Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.” Again, I want you to notice that Paul was speaking, then the healing followed. He didn’t perform the healing and then speak to them, he first spoke to them. The priority is the preaching of the gospel, and then God confirmed the preaching with a miracle or the sign and the wonder.

Paul was preaching; and as he’s preaching, he’s looking at this man. This man is just fixed on him or gazing on him. Paul perceived, I think it was the work of the Holy Spirit kind of giving this wisdom to Paul, he looked at this man and just had this witness in his heart, This man is believing in Jesus Christ and believes that He has power to heal him right now. No doubt, Paul was telling the story about Jesus. Now, put yourself in the crippled man’s place. This fellow is telling us about a guy named Jesus who was healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing lepers, giving sight the the blind, doing all these miracles, and he’s sitting there paralyzed. He’s thinking, Maybe me. Maybe Jesus can do this for me. Paul said, and this Jesus was crucified, buried, but three days later He rose again from the dead and ascended into heaven and He’s alive right now! Faith welled up in this crippled man’s heart and he thought, I believe in Jesus. I believe He can heal me. And, immediately...I would’ve loved to have been a fly on the wall and see this happen, Paul looked right at the man and said, “Stand up and walk.” I want you to notice that it says there that from the time he was born, he had never walked. Immediately, God does this complete and total miracle! He heals this man, gives him the strength and the ability to stand to his feet and to begin to walk. What an amazing thing that was! It also says that he leaped. It reminds us of Acts 3 where Peter prayed for the lame man, “Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk,” and remember the man went walking and leaping and praising God! I guess if you’ve been crippled all your life (it doesn’t tell us how old he was) and you get healed, you’re going to be trying out your new legs, right? You’re not just going to be walking around, you’re going to be bouncing around like Tigger, you know. It’s going to be awesome! God gave me this healing and I’m just ecstatic, and there was a miracle that took place.

The miracle alone, as we’re going to see in a minute, did not produce faith in others. They thought that Paul and Barnabas were Mercury and Jupiter come down in the form of men. “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God,” Paul preached. You know, whenever we see a healing in the Bible it reminds us that Jesus came to heal us from sin. Jesus came to heal us and to give us the ability to walk in a way that pleases God.

We move from “division” and “deliverance”, where God healed this man, delivered him from his crippled state; to thirdly, verses 11-18, “deification,” where they tried to make Paul and Barnabas gods. Beginning in verse 11, “And when the people saw what Paul had done,” more technically, it was what God had done through Paul the Apostle, “they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech Lycaonia,” most likely, they spoke Greek, but they also had a native language. Evidently, this speech of the Lycaonia, Paul and Barnabas did not know. They didn’t understand what they were saying. Paul was probably preaching in Greek, and they knew Greek. It was the universal language, but now they say in the speech of Lycaonia, “The gods

are come down to us in the likeness of men. 12 And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.”

Jupiter was the chief god of the Romans and the Greeks. Actually, in the Greek culture, this was the god Zeus. He was the god Zeus, and they called Paul, Mercurius, because he was the spokesman. He was the one that was speaking. Actually, in the Greek culture, he was the god Hermes. We get our word today, “hermeneutics,” which is the science of interpreting Scripture from the concept to the Greek god Hermes because he interpreted the will of the gods in Greek mythology. Obviously, these are pagans, and they’re deceived. They don’t know and understand what is going on, but they figure that they’re two chief gods, Jupiter and Mercurius or Zeus and Hermes, come down to them in the form of men. That’s what this miracle did to them.

Verse 13, “Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people. 14 Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, 15 And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities,” these false gods, “unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: 16 Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. 17 Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. 18 And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.” This is really an amazing episode. They’re in Lystra preaching, and Paul had performed this miracle on this lame man. The natives or the heathen Gentiles there, they thought these two individuals, Barnabas and Paul, were Zeus and Hermes, come down to us in the form of men. They ran down the street, no doubt, (verse 13) they told the priest, and the priest comes out with this oxen. He has this garland or flowers on it, and he was going to do sacrifice with the people. Now, Paul and Barnabas didn’t understand at first what was going on. They’re walking down the street and see this priest coming at them. He’s got this oxen with the flowers on it. They must’ve thought, Oh, it must be a religious ceremony. It must be one of their feast days or something like that. All of the sudden, they start bowing before Paul and Barnabas. They want to start worshipping them, and they’re going to sacrifice to them. All of the sudden, they start freaking out thinking, Oh no! They think we’re gods!

I want to point out to you that this was a very, very dangerous time for the missionaries. This is a very dangerous temptation for Paul and Barnabas. In just a moment this same crowd that wants to worship them is going to stone them; but at this time it would’ve been so easy and tempting for them to actually play to the people, “Oh, yes! We are gods, and listen to what we have to say,” or try to use that to get inroads to share their message with them. It’s very dangerous when people pat you on the back. You know, the human body is real sensitive? If you pat it on the back, quite often the head does swell. It’s fine to show appreciation. It’s fine to be thankful to people, but when God uses you—it’s so very important—be careful that you don’t begin to take the credit, that you don’t begin to take the glory. God has a way of humbling His

servants, and it was a very dangerous temptation. Satan is very subtle. He comes openly, they tried to stone them and they persecute and oppose them, and then he comes very subtly. I've noticed that if Satan can't get in the front door, he'll come to the back door. If he can't get in the back door, he'll come in the side window. If he can't get in the side window, he comes in the chimney. If he can't get in the chimney, then he'll get in some other way—he'll hide in the trunk of your car and come in the garage and sneak in the house. You've gotta be careful! Satan will pop up anywhere at anytime. He comes in very subtly with all these different ways to try to tempt you, either open opposition or maybe flattery, and you need to be able to resist that and realize, Hey, we are men just like you.

I love what the apostles did. They began to rip their clothes and ran among them saying (verse 15), "...why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you," you see this great man Paul, whom God used so mightily, he even performed miracles; but he says we're of like passions as you are, and what we're doing is preaching "unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God."

Beginning in the middle of verse 15, we have the first recorded message of Paul to a pagan audience. It isn't the first time Paul ever addressed a pagan or total Gentile audience, but it's the first time it's recorded. There's only two of them in the book of Acts: here in Acts 14 when he speaks to the pagans in Lystra that were trying to worship them, and the second is in Acts 17 when they are in the city of Athens preaching to the Athenians and the philosophers there on Mars Hill. Those are the two times that Paul was speaking to them, and there's a marked difference in the approach that Paul had. The gospel doesn't change but our methods can. His approach wasn't to recite Hebrew history or talk about the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and that Jesus is the Messiah, the Promised Son of David. He's talking to pagans. They have no foundation there. This would be more like how we would approach people in our time, in our culture, and in our day. They are Biblically illiterate.

If you're witnessing to the average person on the street, you don't start with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or the promises made to David. They won't have a clue what you're talking about. Most people don't know anything about the Bible, so you have to kind of connect where they're at. I want you to notice some things about what Paul does in his message. He first talks about God being the God of creation. I believe that this is a great way to connect with our culture today because we have pretty much hook, line, and sinker, bought the concept of evolution today which eliminates the need for God. There's no god. There's no special creation. We're just here by accident. It's just happenstance. There was a big bang. We don't know what caused the big bang, but there was a big bang and billions of years later, you know, life started, it evolved, and here we are today. It's really not logical or scientific at all, yet they believe it because it gives them the ability to reject the biblical revelation of a God of creation. So, what does he do? He starts with creation.

By the way, if you get Genesis wrong, you're in big trouble. If you get the first three chapters of Genesis wrong, you've got big trouble. I believe in the literal account of Genesis 1-3, that God created the heavens and the earth, and He did it in six days. Do you think that's too hard for

God? I don't think so. I believe that He spoke it, and in six literal days, not six million years or six billion years...I don't hold to the day-age theory that God needed a lot of time to make it happen or that God created life and that life evolved. I don't believe in theistic evolution. I believe God created man in His likeness and in image, fully created, that man sinned, and because man sinned, we need a Saviour. If you have billions of years of evolution, even if God started it, then when did Adam and Eve sin and how did sin come into the world? And, if you don't have sin, you don't need a Saviour. If there wasn't really an Adam and Eve created by God, then how do you have Jesus, who is the last Adam, who died for our sins and sin coming in the world through Adam and one Man, Jesus, bringing salvation into the world as Paul argues in the book of Romans. The foundation for the gospel is the book of Genesis, but what he does is speak more in general terms about the God (verse 15), "which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein," so, today, if you want to share the gospel, you should have a little bit of an understanding of defending special creation—that we're here by design, we're not here by accident—that God created all things.

Paul then moves to history (verse 16), "Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways." History is His story, and you can recount God's hand on history. Then he moves (verse 17) into providence and what is called common grace. "Nevertheless he left not himself," that is, God, "without witness." God is always going to have a witness of who He is, even to the heathen in the jungle, to the heathen who doesn't have a Bible, and to the person that is lost in the jungle. He's not without a witness, "in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." This is what's called God's providential care and common grace.

Did you ever notice that when it rains, that the rain falls even on atheist lawns? Wouldn't it be funny if, when it rained, only Christians got the rain and their grass was real green; and atheist only had dry, ugly weeds, and it never rained on them and the sun never shined on them and flowers never grew in their lawns? We just had the sunshine and birds only sing in Christian yards. You know, the Bible says that God causes the sun to shine on whom? The just and the unjust. The Bible says it's the goodness of God, which is intended to lead you to repentance. The fact that God gives us seasons...do you know seasons are a blessing from the Lord? You say, "Well, we don't have seasons here in California. It's just hot all the time." We have a little bit, it changes by a degree or two, you know. You have the fresh fall, it's spring right now, and the birds are singing, the bees are buzzing, and the squirrels are running around digging holes in your yard. Then, summer goes to fall, and fall to winter, winter to spring, and God gives us the seasons. You know, every morning God brings the sun up—that's a blessing from God. God brings the sun up, and God provides food for you to eat, and the food tastes good, and it's a blessing, so God is not without a witness.

In Psalm 19, the Bible says, "The heavens declare the glory of God...day unto day uttereth speech...their line is gone out through all the earth. There is no speech or language, where their voice is not heard." In Romans 1, Paul says that even the heathen are without excuse, that God speaks into their conscience. We have a conscience and we have creation, and God speaks in our conscience and through creation that He is powerful, wise, and He provides for

us. That's what he's speaking to them about, and he encouraged them, "And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them." What an amazing episode.

Fourthly, it moves (verses 19-20) to what I've called "decease" or "death" in Lystra. It says, "And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium," so, Paul and Barnabas are in Lystra, but there came from Antioch (which is Antioch Pisidia, not Antioch of Syria) and Iconium, these places that were a distance away, "who persuaded the people, and having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. 20 Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe." Now, how fickle is the crowd? This is why you never put your stock in man, right? One day they're going to do sacrifice to them, "The gods have come down to us in the form of men," and then someone comes and influences them and they follow the crowd. Now, they drag Paul out of the city and actually stone him, and Paul lies in the street believed to be dead by the believers that were gathered around him. In verse 19 it says, "... supposing he had been dead."

Let me say a couple of things about this episode of Paul's stoning. Paul in 2 Corinthians 11 talked about all the suffering that he went through. He talked about several times that he was stoned, shipwrecked, bitten by a snake, and all the things that he went through. Paul was actually stoned here with rocks. They would throw rocks at you until you died. What a horrible way to die! They're standing around his body. Now, we can't be sure, but there are some who believe, and I just mentioned it to you, that when Paul referred to going to heaven in 2 Corinthians 12, he said, "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell," he said, "such an one caught up to the third heaven," which is the dwelling place of God, and he saw and heard things which were unspeakable. It is believed by some, and it's possible, that Paul actually died here. It doesn't say so we don't know, but it could be that this is when Paul went to heaven and experienced the glories and the splendors of heaven; but when he came back, I would just point out, he didn't write a book about it or make a movie about it, okay? He actually said it would be criminal for me to talk about. He actually puts himself in the third person. He said, "I knew a man in Christ," he didn't brag. He didn't talk about himself, and he was only boasting because he was trying to come against false teachers who were saying he wasn't really an apostle. He's actually saying, "I've been to heaven. I've talked to Jesus. I've had these experiences." It could be that this is where this took place, 2 Corinthians 12.

The amazing thing to me is that as they're standing around Paul (verse 20), no doubt, they're praying, crying, they're weeping. Can you imagine? Paul just brought you the gospel. You come to know Jesus Christ, and now these enemies of the gospel and you're down, they've killed him, and he's lying there dead! Their hearts are broken. They're weeping and crying. Again, we don't know, but I love the thought that possibly in this crowd, weeping over the body of Paul were three individuals that we know from the New Testament. There was a grandmother named Lois, a mother named Eunice, and Eunice had a young boy named Timothy. Have a familiar ring to it? Paul wrote 1 and 2 Timothy, and Timothy became a

traveling companion with Paul on his second missionary journey when he comes back through Lystra, Timothy is going to join Paul's missionary company, but he was a convert of Paul. He was from Lystra, so we find that Lois and Eunice were from Lystra, and this young man Timothy, (his name means one who honors God) and it's possible they were in the crowd watching what was going on. If so, I think about what an impression that must've made on this young boy, Timothy, seeing his beloved father in the faith, Paul, stoned, lying there lifeless, dead, praying, and then God revives him. The moment he was revived, do you know what Paul did? He dusted himself off and said, "Let's go back into the city and tell them about Jesus again!" You're thinking, Paul, you've taken too many hits with the rocks, man! Something's slipped up there. You know, you've got something loose. You got hit in the head too many times. Let's get outta here! If I were Paul I'd say, "Let's get out of here! I'm not going to preach there anymore!" I've preached to some hostile congregations, but I've never preached to a group that stoned me. He went right back in and preached to them again!

I'm sure that when those rocks were hitting Paul's body, he remembered the time that he was Saul and watched Stephen being stoned; and they laid their coats around his feet, and he watched them and consented to the stoning of Stephen, whose face shined like the angel and said, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." As those rocks are hitting his body, no doubt, that came back to his mind as he remembered that he consented to the stoning of Stephen and he saw what had taken place. I believe that God gives us grace when we're being persecuted. I believe young Timothy came to the Lord and was mightily influenced by this.

I think that we need to ask God to help us to influence the next generation. I think we need to pray that God would use us to encourage young people, young men and women, young boys and girls, that our lives would be a testimony to them that they would want to pick up the mantle and follow.

Fifthly (verses 21-23), we have "development." As they start on their way back from their missionary journey, going back to the churches that were established, they encouraged them in the Lord. "And when they had preached the gospel," again, a statement that they were preaching the gospel, "to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, 22 Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. 23 And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed." I want you to notice that they're headed backwards. (Can I have my map again up on the screen?) I want you to look at this map for just a moment. They come as far as Derbe, and now they're going backwards. Do you see the arrow headed back. They could've traveled across land, this area is Galatia, modern day Turkey. They could've traveled around here and back to Antioch but instead felt compelled to go back the same way they came so that they could visit the churches that they'd established on their first trip. They go from here and backtrack, and from Attalia they sail underneath Turkey, back to Antioch, and come to their home church. That's the conclusion of this first missionary journey.

Go back to your Bible with me and look at this. What they did was threefold. First, they confirmed the souls (verse 22) or they strengthened the believers. They won them to Christ, they established a church, and they come back to see how they're doing. When we lead people to Christ, we need to nurture and build them up; and we need to plant a church and make sure that they're strong in the Lord. They're strengthening them and exhorting them (verse 22), which means encouraging, to continue in the faith. Then, they make this statement, "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." I want you to mark and notice that. I want you to understand that he's not teaching here that Christians are going to go through the tribulation period, the seven years leading up to the Second Coming. I believe that is a reference to this statement in Acts, to the tribulation that we experience right now as Christians that has as its source the world, the flesh, and the devil. The tribulation that is future—after the rapture, before the Second Coming—is the tribulation called the Great Tribulation that has as its source God Himself. That's a very important distinction. We are not appointed unto wrath. We're not going to go through the tribulation period because it comes from God. It's His wrath, but right now, right here as Christians, we do go through tribulation. We go through trials. We go through suffering. We go through hardships and difficulties, but he's not talking about the Great Tribulation.

Notice in verse 23 that they were appointing. They were strengthening, encouraging, and they were appointing. What were they appointing? Elders in every church. An elder was a pastor. The term "elders" is synonymous with pastors, the spiritual leaders of the church. They met the qualifications and laid hands on them, recognized their gifting and calling, and they were to be the shepherds or the pastors over these churches; so the mission of the church is the church establishing churches. "And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord," which means that they were entrusting, they had trusted them to God; so they were strengthening, encouraging, appointing, and entrusting them to God. They were going to leave them. They were not going to see them for some time, and so they said, "We're praying for you. We're entrusting you into God's hands." Remember, Jesus said, "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," and they gave them spiritual leadership.

One last section (verses 24-28), this is "description." Just write down the word "description." They go back to the church in Antioch and describe all that God had done for them. "And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. 25 And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia," which is the port, and underneath the Turkish coastline, they sailed back to Syria. "And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled." This is the end of the first missionary journey. There are two more still to go. "And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. 28 And there they abode long time with the disciples."

I've always loved that closing statement, "...they rehearsed all that God had done." Notice they didn't rehearse all the trials, all the trouble, all the difficulties, all the hardships, all the problems.

“You should’ve seen Paul, he got stoned. The water was really bad. Barnabas ate a burrito and got sick. I told him not to eat that thing. It was terrible. We got rained on. It was hot. It was cold. I mean, it was miserable. We were tired, and you know, you really ought to give us a vacation right now.” No. They just said, “Wow! You can’t believe what God did!” “...all that God had done.” They were rehearsing the fact that God, by His Spirit, through them, the preaching of the Word...the power of God, preaching the Word of God, by the men of God, to the glory of God—to God be the glory, great things He has done! Amen? So, they come back. The church listens. That Wednesday night it was packed out. Paul and Barnabas were going to give their missionary report and talk about all that God had done and how God had “opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles,” which is significant because when we go into chapter 15 next week, the controversy becomes whether or not the Gentiles could be Christians without becoming Jews first. “And there they abode long time with the disciples.”

Here's the pattern. First, you go and preach the gospel. So, the mission of the church is missions, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature,” but the mission of missions is the church. Don't forget that. God is all about the local church and bringing people to salvation in Christ, getting them planted in a church or planting a church and appointing leaders in that church, encouraging the church, building up the church. God has given pastor/teachers for the edifying of the saints so they can do the work of the ministry; but our mission is missions, and the mission of our mission is church planting, winning people to Jesus Christ, and they taught believers and appointed pastors and God used it to change the world. Amen?