

WORSHIP SERVICE - 9.14.2025

PART 32 - THE CRISIS OF COMPLACENT CHRISTIANITY

I. INTRODUCTION

- There is a dangerous manner in which modern Christianity is sometimes portrayed, and that is that following Jesus will make your life easier.
- It is a brand of Christianity that equates comfort and ease with blessing.
- But when life gets difficult, if we get sick, lose our job, bills start to pile up, or we face some kind of hostility or rejection, we wonder if God has abandoned us.
- But in our passage today we are confronted with a very different picture of the Christian life.
- It is one of ongoing warfare, resistance, opposition, and hostility.
- Wherever the gospel advances and Christ builds his church, the world, the flesh, and the evil one pushes back.
- Acts 14 summarizes the Christian life with sobering words by Paul, the apostle of the Lord, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."
- That shatters any notion that the Christian life is a lifelong vacation—no, the Christian life is a pilgrimage through enemy territory.
- And there is a very real crisis in the American church, and that is that the faith that many seem to have adopted is not a biblical one, but a complacent, comfortable and coddled one.
- Complacency is that slow drift into spiritual drowsiness and apathy.
- And we need God to shake us and wake us up from our stupor and slumber.
- Comfortable, complacent Christianity cannot survive in a world at war with Christ.
- The Christian life is not about coasting but contending.
- May we not be so concerned for our safety but be steadfast in our faith, emboldened to make Christ known even more, while trusting him to give us the strength to endure no matter what tribulations may bring.

Acts 14:1-28

Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. 2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. 3 So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. 4 But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. 5 When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, 6 they learned of it

and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, 7 and there they continued to preach the gospel.

Paul and Barnabas at Lystra

8 Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. 9 He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, 10 said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking. 11 And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" 12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 13 And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. 14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, 15 "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. 16 In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. 17 Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." 18 Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

Paul Stoned at Lystra

19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. 20 But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. 21 When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. 23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Paul and Barnabas Return to Antioch in Syria

24 Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. 25 And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, 26 and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. 27 And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. 28 And they remained no little time with the disciples.

II. THE WORD ADVANCES AMIDST ADVERSITY

- After the events in Antioch in Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas move on to Iconium.
- They head straight for the synagogue on the Sabbath, going to the Jews first.
- V1 ...they spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed.
- They spoke with anointing, conviction, and persuasiveness and many came to faith in Christ.
- As the gospel advances, adversity comes.
- As the kingdom of darkness is plundered there is spiritual opposition.

- Unbelieving Jews stir up the Gentiles to oppose the messengers of the gospel.
- They “poisoned their minds against the brothers.”
- That’s what god hating people do, they poison the minds of people against the truth, against the gospel, against the word of the Lord.
- Now, this did not deter Paul and Barnabas from the mission. They persevered. They stayed for a long time in Iconium.
- And God was with them. The Lord himself bore witness to the word of his grace, by granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.
- But the people of the city were divided. And when the threats of violence escalated, Paul and Barnabas fled to nearby Lystra and Derbe to continue to preach the gospel.
- The gospel divides. It draws a line in the sand.
- The message of the cross will save some and harden others.
- There is nothing neutral about the gospel message. And the gospel is never preached in neutral territory.
- Where Christ is proclaimed there is a call to allegiance to Christ above all else.
- We can expect resistance.
- We shouldn’t be surprised by hostility when we talk about Christ and his word.
- Complacent, comfortable Christianity avoids those kinds of conversations that create that kind of tension. Complacent Christianity avoids conflict.
- We must be willing to lose friendships and relationships for Christ when we proclaim truth.
- When you receive pushback from your faith don’t shrink back.

III. THE WAR EXPOSES IDOLATRY

- Paul and Barnabas continue their ministry in Lystra and Derbe.
- They encounter a man who was crippled from birth. This story is a call back to Peter and John’s encounter with the lame beggar at the temple gate in Acts 3.
- They’re preaching the gospel, and Luke notes that the man was listening to Paul speak, and Paul, looking intently at the man, saw that he had faith to be made well.
- Paul sees that he is receiving the message, he is trusting Christ, and tells the man to stand up on his feet, and the man is healed.
- What happens next after this healing is both shocking and fascinating.
- Lystra was known as a rural, backwater, countryside town. Its people were pagan idolaters, prone to superstition.
- And they witness this miracle and the crowd goes wild. They cry out in their native local dialect, “*The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!*”
- They say that Barnabas is Zeus and Paul, who seems to be the chief spokesman, is Hermes.
- Now that seems strange to us, but in the ancient Greco-Roman world, there was the belief that the gods would visit people and come in the likeness of normal men.
- The priest of Zeus comes out with oxen and garlands and he wants to offer a sacrifice to them with the people.
- When Paul and Barnabas realize what is happening, they tear their garments, a Jewish sign when something blasphemous has taken place, and they run out towards the crowd, shouting, “*Stop what you’re doing! We’re not gods, we’re men just like you.*”

- Paul and Barnabas know the danger of misplaced glory.
- This is one of Satan's subtle tactics, especially with ministers, he doesn't use persecution to silence them, he uses praise and flattery to puff up their ego.
- They continue, "*We came to bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God.*"
- They are speaking to largely pagan people. They are not monotheistic and they need to be convinced that there is only one true and living God.
- Their gods need to be abandoned because they're worthless.
- There is one God and he is the God of all Creation.
- The other gods they worshiped are powerless.
- The nations had walked in ignorance in times past but they were recipients of the sustaining goodness of the Creator.
- But it seems like Paul's words fell on deaf ears.
- They can barely restrain the crowd from offering sacrifices to them.
- In persisting in their idolatry, they are refusing to be hospitable to God by rejecting his messengers.
- You and I can expect to be misunderstood when we speak for Christ.
- Now, our culture may not call you Zeus, or Hermes, or Aphrodite or Hera.
- But it will seduce you and tempt you to idolatry to lull you into complacency.
- It will offer you comfort, fame, success, popularity, approval, safety and security as objects of worship.
- These can become as much gods in our lives as anything else.
- Never underestimate the human propensity to make idols of anything.
- Why is the American church complacent?
- Because it has made a god out of comfort, ease, material wealth and success.
- As a result, the church has lost its prophetic voice!
- We can't tell the world to abandon their false and worthless idols while we are clutching to our own!
- Our complacency, our desire for a conflict-free Christianity, has made us impotent and silent.
- Our tendency has been to distill our faith down to the lowest possible denominator. What is the least costliest way to live and still claim to be a follower of Jesus?
- That's how many live out their Christian life; safe, easy, and commitment-free.
- Not realizing just how dangerous that can be.
- Matthew 16:24-26 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?

IV. THE WAY OF THE KINGDOM IS THROUGH TRIBULATION

- V19 we see Jews come from Antioch and Iconium to persecute Paul and Barnabas.
- They persuade the crowd to seize Paul, stone him, drag him out of the city, and leave him for dead.
- The very ones who were hailing Paul as a god are ready to kill him.
- The Lord enables him to rise up and what does he do?

- He reenters the city, regroups with Barnabas, and the next day they go to the nearby village of Derbe and they preach the gospel, making many disciples.
- They are examples that the gospel is worth suffering for.
- Don't ever forget that!
- And they make their way back to their home church in Antioch, going through the cities they were in before.
- They don't run away from persecution. They're not more concerned about themselves or their safety.
- And what do they do?
- They strengthen the souls of the disciples.
- They strengthen the churches by appointing elders and committing them to the Lord.
- They encourage them to continue in the faith.
- They tell them that entrance to the kingdom of heaven is through the path of many tribulations.
- The kingdom will not be sauntered into by complacent, comfortable, and compromising Christians.
- Christ's people will enter crawling, humbled, and bowed down.
- The road to the kingdom is not paved with ease but with endurance.
- Paul wrote to the church in Galatia, "I bear on my body the marks of Jesus." (Gal. 6:17)

CONCLUSION

- You may not be physically stoned for your faith in Christ.
- But our godless culture will stone you psychologically and emotionally and spiritually for your faith in Christ.
- There is no neutrality—we are at war!
- Will you choose comfort and complacency or will you choose courage and Christ?
- Will you choose the path of least resistance, content with a Christianity that demands little and costs nothing?
- Don't trade comfort for the courage that is required in this hour!
- Some of you might be tempted to fear the times we are in.
- But the Christ who called you to take up your cross and follow him will also give you the strength to endure and bear up under tribulation.
- He will see to it that you make it to the other side of tribulation where the kingdom of God lies.
- When he called his disciples, he commissioned and said that he is with them to the end of the age.
- Our suffering and exalted Savior walks the path of tribulation with us; sustaining us and strengthening us.
- So how do we respond?
 - Expect Opposition
 - Endure with Courage
 - Encourage one another
- The opposition the apostles and the early church faced, was all in the looming glory of Christ's exaltation to the right hand of the Father—he is presently reigning and covering his church.
- We are at war—but the outcome is assured.
- Endure opposition, remain steadfast, live courageously, persevere in tribulations, glory awaits us.
- The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. (Rom 16:20)

APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

In light of today's message....

- What did I learn about the gospel?
- How can I apply what I learned about the gospel to my life?
- With whom can I share the gospel this week?