

Acts 14 - John Karmelich

One of the questions I regularly deal with in this study is on the fact God calls us to be His witnesses to the world. It's not a request, but a requirement! The bad news of giving of our life to Jesus is we're now required to use our life as a witness for Him. That doesn't mean we must move to a foreign country and wear a Jesus "sandwich board" all day. It just means we're saved for a purpose which is to use our lives as a witness for Him. The reason we're to make that effort isn't to earn our salvation, but to express our gratitude for what God's done for us (give us eternal life)! Whether we like it or not, that's why He did create us, so we might as well accept that reality!

Believe it or not, all of that leads us perfectly to Chapter 14 of the book of Acts. For my newcomers, it is essential to realize the second half of this book (that started in the last chapter) focuses on Paul as he did three missionary journeys for Jesus. The book wraps up with Paul being sent to Rome for the crime of "being a nuisance" (preaching the Gospel). This book covers decades. We don't get a blow-by-blow detail of each trip. The author (Luke) highlights specific things designed to teach us how God wants us to be a witness for Him. This chapter marks the end of Paul's first journey that began in Chapter 13. In this chapter we'll read of Paul being preaching Jesus, getting stoned (attempts to kill him) for preaching it, and continuing his mission in spite of his suffering. Most of us don't deal with Paul's intensity of his level of witnessing to people or suffering. Still this lifestyle's in effect what Jesus called us to do as His witnesses to the world. My point is as we study the details of this chapter, don't think, "Good for Paul or too bad he had to suffer so much". Instead what we're to see is as we use our lives to glorify God we are to live as He calls us and yes deal with "stuff" as we make a difference for Him.

Realize my goal isn't to scare anyone away. For most of us, we're to be a witness for Jesus right where we are and live in a way that people think there's something different about us and people can tell we're using our lives for His glory. I'm not claiming to be perfect, but we're always "on the clock" for Him so we must keep that in mind as we go through life. I ask as you study this, keep in mind that we "use our lives as a witness for Jesus" whether we like it or not. I also realize I'm "preaching to the choir" here. I hope us Christian veterans see things in this chapter to remind us to use our lives for His glory. I've got that speech out of my system, it's time to start on the details of this chapter.

The chapter opens with Paul and his traveling companion (for Journey #1) Barnabas working their way through the area (it's not a city) of Galatia. It's part of Turkey today. As Paul does, he starts preaching in the synagogue (They allow guests to speak after the ritual aspects are done.) Some believed and yes others didn't. All of that lead to the nonbelievers trying to stone Paul to death. It didn't even slow him down as he just went to the next town to try again! I don't know about you, but if some tried to kill me for preaching Jesus, I admit I'd be discouraged, so I give Paul credit. He just went to the next place, in this case was the cities of Lystra and Derbe (same region of Galatia) and preached the gospel again.

In Lystra there was a man crippled from birth. Paul figured "Hey, no problem!" He then cured the man there on the spot. So why can't we do mighty miracles to prove Jesus is God? First of all, we have His word (the bible) which is 30% predictions that offer far greater proof than any miracle. I'd also add that I've seen God do His greatest work in the "Miracle Department" when it comes to leading nonbelievers to Jesus. Missionaries will often tell of amazing stories with no explanation other than God working. I still trust in His word, first and foremost.

From there, Paul had to deal with a new problem, "Praise and our ego". If Satan can't defeat us through persecution he will often try praise. It appeals to our ego! Paul could have said, "Hey, the locals think

we're gods because of the miracle, so let's use that thought to preach Jesus more effectively! I want you to notice in the text that when this occurred, Paul made his best effort to deny he was a "god". There's a false legend that this city was once destroyed by Greek gods for its failure to honor them. It meant that the locals aren't taking any chances! The point about story is we're to rely upon God's power to convert those He wants to convert. Accepting praise we don't deserve (it is for God that praise is reserved when it comes to accepting the Gospel message) can be just as dangerous to our health as persecution. By the way, it took Paul and Barnabas a bit to figure out they were being honored as gods as they had "the lost in translation issue" of what was happening.

Since "praise" didn't get Paul sidetracked by undeserved praise, Satan went back to his "tried and true" method of persecution. As I stated in the last lesson, "bad stuff just happens" when we use our lives as a witness for Jesus. The city Paul was in to start this chapter (and other places) had people trying to kill Paul via stoning. Obviously Paul lived through it as we're only half way through the book. So did Paul die and rise again here? I'd argue no, or else Luke would mention that. I'd argue that God allowed Paul to go through that to test his faith. Realize that God often tests our faith even when we're working hard on his behalf. Why? To quote one of my mentors, "God stays up late thinking of ways to test me. He's constantly asking me in effect, "Do you trust Me now, even through all of this?" My point is God did not prevent that stoning. He allowed it to occur to test Paul and Barnabas's faith.

It kind of makes us stop and think. How much are we willing to put up with to be a witness for Jesus? I always argue that I don't fear death, but I'm not a big fan of pain! It just humbles me as I read all this about Paul and what he went through to be a witness for Jesus.

Then the chapter ends with Paul working his way back to his home base which is a city called Antioch (again in Turkey today). He traveled through places he went through preaching the Gospel before as it was his goal to strengthen the new churches, not just plant them. In effect that's the end of the first of the three missionary journeys.

OK John, all of this is nice history. Let's be honest we're not stoned for preaching Jesus and most of us go about our lives here where there are plenty of churches trying to be the best witness we can as we're going through our lives. How does any of this apply to us? Again, the issue comes back to the fact we are called to be a living witness for Jesus. It doesn't mean all of us have to travel to foreign countries. I would argue it is important for us to pray for opportunities to be a witness for Him and make ourselves available for such opportunities. God loves to work with those willing to use their lives for His glory!

I'm just saying if we're willing, God is more than willing to use us for His glory. Remember it's not the number of people we save, it's whether or not we actually use our lives as a witness for Him. That's the key to studying this book, to realize we are a witness for Jesus and this chapter gives us instructions on how to be the type of witness God wants us to be.

On the same page where you downloaded this summary is a detailed lesson on Chapter 14. That is on a verse-by-verse basis. To read that, click on one of the other two links on this chapter. You're always welcome to e-mail me and I hope you like this. Thanks, John