

Paul's First Missionary Journey

by Steve Gallagher

Paul's First Missionary Journey was a significant event in the early Christian church, marked by the conversion of the proconsul Sergius Paulus and the establishment of a church in Cyprus.

Duration: 57:35

Scripture: Acts 13:47, Acts 14:22, 1 Corinthians 3:6-7, Galatians 6:9, Philippians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:24, 2 Timothy 4:5

Topics: "Missionary Work", "Persevering Faith"

Description

This sermon reflects on Paul's missionary journey, highlighting the challenges faced, the response to the gospel message, and the importance of staying faithful to God's work despite opposition and discouragement. It emphasizes the reality that not everyone will respond positively to the gospel, but God will bring forth fruit in His timing and way, even if it may not be outwardly huge. The story of Timothy's conversion and the impact of the gospel message on different individuals are used as examples to encourage perseverance in ministry.

Transcript

Okay, last week we were primarily looking at Paul's conversion, which probably happened about 37 A.D. And this week, we're going to pick up the story in Acts 13, and we'll cover 13 and 14. Let's just open in a word of prayer. Lord, I just pray for your presence, I pray for your anointing, I pray for your leading, I pray, Lord, that you will just be in control with the way this talk goes here this morning.

We thank you, Lord. We thank you for this life that we are examining each week. What a blessing to be able to see the way that you worked through this man.

Help us to get what we need to get, in Jesus' name, amen. All right, so Paul was converted about 37, something like that. And then we know he spent three years in Damascus and or Arabia.

We don't know exactly how much of the time was spent in either place. And then he spent about four to five years in Tarsus, which would have put him there, you know, 40 to 44 or 45 AD, something like that. And he comes, you know, Barnabas comes and gets him, brings him back to Antioch.

It was probably about 44. And he's been in Antioch now for a while, just quietly ministering. Now, I want to go back to that conversion experience, because something very powerful happened in this man's life.

This guy, as we talked about last week, was so full of himself, so full of pride, and just one of those aggressive, abrasive, pushy personalities that is not easily tamed. And you can see a meekness in this man's life, even from the earliest days, which is amazing. You know, in a lot of ways, I can relate to Paul, because I had a nature very much like his in that way, in the negative sense.

And it took so many years for God to break me to a point of really being willing to, I mean, just sit like a child and listen to him and do what he said, you know. To my shame, I say that. It's taken me many years and a lot of breakings to get me to that place.

But apparently, for Paul, it happened early. And I'll bring out why here in a second. But during this span of time, things have been happening.

It's just that for whatever reason, he didn't share it with Luke, or Luke didn't feel a need to get it into the story, you know. But for instance, in 2 Corinthians 11, there's a list of the things that Paul suffered, like five times beaten by the Jews with 39 stripes. There isn't one single occasion of that mentioned in the book of Acts, or any of Paul's other writings.

Five times. Well, when did that happen? Did it happen throughout that story? And for whatever reason, Luke just neglected to share that? Or did some of this happen in that period in Tarsus? It would seem like that. That some of these things happened during that span of time.

We don't know exactly what went on for those number of years. But God is working in Paul's life. And another thing that we can see is that he has had three visions during this span of time.

You know, the Damascus Road vision, and then you remember in Acts 22, when he's recounting his story about his time in Jerusalem, when he was hanging around with the apostles there, that the Lord appeared to him and told him that he would be leaving and that he was going to send him to the Gentiles and all of that. So that was the second one. But also in 2 Corinthians 12, he said 14 years ago, a man went up into the third heavens.

Well, that was in 56 AD. So that takes us back to 42, which puts us in Tarsus. So while he's in Tarsus, apparently, because I'm pretty sure about that 56 AD number, that's pretty close to being right.

So that would mean 42 AD. He had this tremendous experience where he's taken up into the third heavens. Man, that's just amazing.

And saw things that were inexpressible, that he couldn't even find the language in human terms to articulate what he saw up there. It was so overwhelming. But on the outward, look at this man.

You know, he goes to Antioch, and he's just one of the guys. I mean, he's not trying to... He's not thrusting himself forward there in Antioch. He's just trying to obey the Lord.

You can just get the sense of real meekness in Paul at this early stage. Which, like I say, to me is amazing because I have a nature like Paul's. And I understand very much how much thorough breaking it has taken for me to get to where I'm at today, almost 30 years later in ministry.

In fact, for me, it started with a gun to my head. You know what I'm saying? I've gone through some real serious breaking, but Paul got it early and started ministry the right way, which is amazing. It's such an awesome thing that... What I mean by starting ministry the right way is being meek.

And when God says go, He goes with all His might, with all His heart, throws Himself into doing mercy and living for other people and trying to help other people and ministering whatever ways God gives Him. But when God doesn't tell him to do anything, He's just quiet, waiting. Just, you want me to take a lowly position here? Okay, Lord.

You know, He's not thrusting Himself forward. He's not driven by self-ambition to be somebody or to get anything out of it for self. He's just in it for the Lord.

So He starts off the right way, and we see the effects still unfolding from that Damascus Road experience. That's how powerful He was affected. I'll put it this way.

That's how powerfully devastated He was as a man in that three-day period and all of that. And we see it coming forth, not so much in outward fruit yet, but in the way that He's going about God's business here. All right, so let's get into the story here.

We're going to have to kind of fly through this a little bit. Acts 13. Now, there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers.

Barnabas and Simeon, who was called Niger. Excuse me. And Niger is a Roman term, I think, that just means black.

So he was a black man. And Lucius of Cyrene and Mana'an, who had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul, the last one mentioned. And that says something to me, you know.

But here we have multiple leadership. Barnabas, get the right side of Barnabas. If you can go back to the early church messages, Barnabas played a key role.

He was right there in the middle of everything. He was one of the 120. He was right there with all the stuff unfolding in those earliest days.

He was right there when Ananias and Sapphira were struck down. He went through that whole process, and now he's been sent to Antioch, this new church that's budding and burgeoning forth and so on. He's sent there.

He's basically the main leader there. And, you know, he is the man, so to speak. He's the guy that has come down from Jerusalem, come up from Jerusalem.

Anyway, so here's the leadership team. Saul is included, but he's kind of like, well, yeah, and Saul. His only claim to fame really was that he had been a persecutor of the church.

While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting. Now, what does that mean, ministering to the Lord? Just going about the duties that God had given them to do. You know, he was, they, these guys were doing things right.

So often you see in ministry, you get the sense that people are in it for self. Or there's a huge mixture and a lot of self in what they do. But these men were ministering to the Lord.

When they were ministering to people, they were ministering to the Lord. And that attitude carries forth. And you'll see in Paul's life later, you'll see how that attitude that, listen, I am not doing this for applause.

I'm not doing this to get people to like me, to love me, to keep their adoration on me. I am doing this unto the Lord. And when you do it unto the Lord, and you've got the right attitude, you don't need applause.

You don't need a lot of back slapping. You don't need everything to go right. You don't need people to love you.

You're doing it as unto the Lord. And that's what they're doing. And that's their mindset.

And that's probably a lot of why that church was experiencing revival and so much life in that church. People getting saved because they had the right mindset. Well, anyway, while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting.

So also mixed in here is, it seems like a special time. For us, it would be a half day of prayer. I don't know what it was with them, but they're seeking the Lord.

And maybe they had a sense that the Lord wanted to say something to them. I don't know, but they're seeking the Lord. And all of a sudden, the Holy Spirit speaks to them, probably through one of the other three men, was a prophet, no doubt.

And he gets a clear word from the Lord. And here it is. I mean, just clear, ringing clear.

And sometimes it can come that way. Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Man, what a tremendous thing.

Then when they had fasted and prayed. Now, this is a separate time, okay? There's a gap between two and three here. They had been in some kind of a special fasting and prayer time.

Then they get this call. This word comes forth. So there's preparations.

There's planning. There's more praying. They're trying to figure out.

Then when it was time to send them out, there's a special ceremony of fasting and prayer attached to that. And that's what is being referred to here in verse three. They didn't take it flippantly.

It wasn't some mechanical ceremony like it is for us so often today. This was serious business. They were sending these men out into the unknown.

And they were going to be supporting them in prayer and so on. So when they had fasted and prayed and laid hands on them, they sent them away. And I just don't have time to get into everything.

But it really meant something in that situation. Now, one thing I'll just mention here briefly is that it's clear that at this point, Barnabas is the man. And Saul is a leader.

He's not like John Mark, who also is going along. He's not even mentioned yet. He's just an attendant.

So Saul is a minister. He's recognized as a minister. But Barnabas is the main guy.

No question about that. Barnabas is named first in both these two situations. They're going to Barnabas' homeland.

It's Barnabas' nephew who's going along with them. I'm telling you, this is Barnabas' deal here. And Saul is his aide, but lesser, you know, in a sense, somehow.

So being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia. And from there, they sailed to Cyprus. Okay, Seleucia was just the port.

It was down a few miles from where Antioch was. And then they took a ship across that little Mediterranean gulf right there, went over to Cyprus, and then they reached Salamis. So Cyprus is an island, it's kind of shaped like that.

On the eastern side is Salamis, and Pathos is on the western side. So let's just pick it up here. When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.

And they also had John as their helper. Okay, so John Mark finally gets mentioned here. But they basically went from one island to the next, went around to all the Jewish synagogues.

That's how they're starting. These are people that have some background with the word of God. They're going to be the easiest ones in a sense, even though you have to cut through all of the religious garbage that has built up over the years.

At least they have some kind of a sense of the God of Israel, the God of Abraham. The other people, the heathens, all they know are Zeus and, you know, all these Greek mythology gods and all that stuff. So that requires a whole different thing.

But anyway, so they're going about through these different synagogues. And let's see what happens here. When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet, whose name was Bar-Jesus.

Now, I think he called himself Bar-Jesus attaching himself to the magic worker from Nazareth, who had been around some years before. You know what I mean? So I think that he just took on that name to enhance, you know, in some sort of a way. Maybe he was actually telling people that he was Jesus of Nazareth's son, you know, or something.

Who knows? These guys were liars, and they would attach themselves to Roman dignitaries. And they would act like they were wise men. They messed around in the black arts.

And, you know, who knows what kinds of things, demonic activity would go on. So people would recognize that, hey, there's some kind of magical power with this guy. And so sometimes these governors would get these guys around them and, you know, consult them and, you know, what are the gods saying about this and that sort of stuff.

So he's one of those kind of guys. And he's attached himself to this Sergius Paulus guy, who's the governor. Okay, so here we are, verse 7. Who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence.

This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. All right, now this is an official summons. Okay, this isn't just like a low-key invitation.

Hey, come here and, you know, come over and tell me what you're talking about. This is a summons, an official. I want you to come in here, present your teachings, so I know what you're bringing to my people

and my island and my region.

I want to hear what you're telling people. And to him, it's nothing more than some Greek philosopher or some Jewish exorcist or some sorcerer from, you know, the Far East. It's just another traveling guy, you know, that's how he's seeing it.

But something happens. When Paul starts speaking, the presence of God is there. And when the presence of God is there, when a man of God is speaking, the spirit of God can go into a person's heart and start reaching them in the core of their being.

So something's happening here. And this man is, like, being affected by Paul's words. But Eliamus, this is just a, well, it says right here in translation, was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

And that's what, of course, false prophets always do. But Saul, who was also known as Paul, okay, finally, we can just go with the name Paul, all right? So he's finally, he sees it now that, okay, my main call is to the Gentiles. I'm going with my Greek name now.

And so he does from here on out. But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit. Man, full of the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him.

Man, what a gaze Paul must have had. And we'll see here in a minute how he fixed his gaze on this lame man in Lystra. Man, we'll get to that.

And said, you who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil. So in other words, instead of bar Jesus, you are bar Satan. That's what, you know, bar means, a son.

You enemy of all righteousness. Will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? In other words, you corrupt everything. You twist everything.

It's all for self. And I mean, he just, his words must have been piercing. Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you.

Now, when you break out the hand of the Lord, watch out, because that usually means something powerful, mighty, in a retributive sense, is about to happen. And that's what happens here. And you will be blind and not see the sun for a time.

And immediately, a mist and a darkness fell upon him. And he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand. So he's at least outwardly, totally humbled by this.

But we never hear anything else about him. So we don't know what happened with him. But look at verse 12.

Then the proconsul believed. When he saw what had happened, you know, that just really got his attention. But being amazed at the teaching of the Lord.

You know, miracles can get people's attention. But it's the truth that reaches people's hearts. You know, it's always the truth.

Miracles, yeah, but who knows what happened, and where's the source of that, and so on. But when you're speaking pure truth, that goes into people, you know. And that's where lives are changed.

Now, Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga and Pamphylia. But John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem. Okay, now let me just say something here real quick.

Perga is on, you know, the southern Turkey coast. So they take a boat across this inlet and go north, directly north, and get onto the mainland. And John Mark, something has happened now.

And he's decided he's not going to go on any further with them. And so he turns back. But you know, what's interesting to me is we never hear anything else about this proconsul.

Paul never went back there. Why didn't Paul stay? You know, the governor just got saved. Why didn't he stay and try to develop a church there and really try to get things going? I don't know.

God's ways are not our ways, you know. I mean, no sooner this guy gets saved, and they're gone. They're on a ship, and they're out of there.

And Paul never goes back again. Now, Barnabas does later, and we'll get to that. But Paul never did.

So they get over to Perga, and something happens. And most people believe that he got malaria there because it was an area known for malaria. Just, you know, it's in the lowlands there by the sea.

And it's just one of those hotbeds of malaria. Now, let me read what Walvoord said about John Mark leaving. Because he really pretty much captures the different possibilities.

What caused Mark to desert is open to speculation. One, perhaps he was disillusioned with the change in leadership. You know, I could see that.

You know, something has definitely changed. Now, Paul is becoming the leader, asserting himself. And John Mark probably didn't like Paul's strong personality.

Maybe he was intimidated by him. Now, all of a sudden, his uncle is no longer the main guy. Paul is becoming that.

He's emerging into this leadership position. And I could see where that could be part of it. Two, the new emphasis on Gentiles may have been too much of an adjustment for a Palestinian Jew like Mark.

I could see that as well. He's just kind of getting his nose bent out of shape because they're not now focused on the Jewish people. Now, they're going out to these filthy Gentiles.

You know, he's a Hebrew. Remember that. Remember the whole Hebrew mentality that was there in Jerusalem.

Number three, possibly he was afraid of the dangerous road over the Taurus Mountains to Antioch, which Paul was determined to travel. And, you know, I'll say something else here in a second about that. Four, there is some evidence Paul became quite ill in Perga, possibly with malaria, as the city of Perga was subject to malarial infections.

The missionary party may have gone inland to higher ground to avoid the ravages of malaria. And Mark, in discouragement over this, may have returned home. Okay.

And, you know, this area that they go through, these Antioch, I mean, these Cilician highlands there, are known for being robber infested. I don't have time to go into it, but even the Romans wouldn't go in there. It was so bad.

So, you know, they end up coming, getting over the highlands, and they get up on the plateau in Turkey there. And my sense is that they probably were wanting to head west. But, well, let me read what he said later in Galatians 4. Paul wrote this.

But you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time. So it had something to do with the decision making to go on up straight north into the Galatian region, you know, which was Pisidian, Antioch, and some of the other places he went to. Let me continue.

And that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition, you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus himself. Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness that if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. You know, so we know that Paul had eye problems the rest of his life.

That's why you see other people having to write his letters for him, because his eyes were messed up, probably from this malarial infection, got into his sinuses or something, and somehow affected his eyesight. So, but anyway, Paul and Barnabas continue on. In verse 14, but going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian, Antioch.

And I went there, and David Leopold and myself, it's one of the three places we went where the ruins were all really intact there. It's just out in the wilderness. It's beautiful.

We actually walked on the Roman road that Paul and Barnabas walked on. And some of the buildings are still there, but it's just sitting there the way that it was from centuries ago. You know, no city was built up in the same spot, which is why they remain there to this day.

And anyway, he goes in there, he preaches the word to these people, and there is a reaction right away. This is Paul's first recorded sermon. And, you know, he's preaching to primarily a Jewish congregation.

So his sermon kind of reflects the same things that Peter's sermons reflected earlier. And the Jews get very upset. Well, let me read 42.

We're going to skip all the way ahead to 42. As Paul and Barnabas were going out after the sermon, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath. These are Galatian Christians.

You know what I mean? They would become Christians. Some mixture of Jews. And at first, it was just proselytes, you know, Gentiles who were there, part of the synagogue, trying to get in with this Jewish religion, which they have a sense has truth in it.

But, you know, whatever, they're trying to work their way through that. And when Paul preaches, there's life in it. There's truth.

There is a number of these people get really impacted by Paul's message, which is what we're seeing here. So a whole week goes by. Paul and Barnabas are probably going into different people's homes and sharing the word with them, opening up scriptures to them even more.

And then in verse 44, the next Sabbath, nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. Same words that were used back in chapter five about the high priest with Peter and John when they were preaching.

And began contradicting the things spoken by Paul and were blaspheming. All right. Now I'm going to read this quote from Longenecker.

Not only was the synagogue being flooded by Gentiles as though it were a common theater or town hall, but even more became clear that Paul and Barnabas were ready to speak directly to Gentiles without first relating them in some way to Judaism. The majority of the Jews, including undoubtedly the leaders of the Jewish community, were apparently unwilling to countenance a salvation as open to Gentiles as it was to Jews. So in their opposition, they not only talked abusively, but they were blaspheming, et cetera.

So this is the formation of the First Galatian Church. And, you know, they managed to get the people, many of the people riled up in the area, drove them out. Let's skip ahead to chapter 14 and pick it up.

They walked 90 miles, okay? So just understand, this is not like just going up the road five miles. From Pisidian Antioch to Iconium is 90 miles. So however long it takes to walk 90 miles, what, a week or something? I don't know.

But, you know, they must have been praying all that way, right? They're praying about, God, please come to this next city we're coming to. We're coming to Iconium, which apparently was a halfway decent-sized city like Pisidian Antioch was also. You know, Lord, please come direct us, anoint us, just praying.

And they finally get there a week later or whatever. And verse one, in Iconium, they entered the synagogue of the Jews together and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and of Greeks. You know, so right off the bat, there is a response there.

Such a manner, really, to me, it only means that the Holy Spirit was moving. But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren. This is just hilarious to me.

Therefore, you know, okay, they've riled up everyone against them, all this hostility against Paul and Barnabas. Therefore, in other words, okay, now here's their response to that. They spent a long time there.

That's just so funny to me, you know, that their response, you expect it to be the exact opposite. Therefore, they moved on and went to the next city. No, therefore, they dug their heels in.

You know, there's a place for retreat. Sometimes you have to retreat in ministry, but sometimes you stand your ground. And I'm sure the Lord let them know that this is one of those times, no, just stay there, be calm, I'm with you.

You know, like he did for Paul later in Corinth. I'm with you. I have many people in this city.

I want you to stay here for a while. And so they spent a long time there speaking boldly. I don't know what a long time is, maybe a few months.

Getting a church solidly established there. Okay, so they're relying upon the Lord who was testifying to the word of his grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands. So the Lord is coming in and backing everything they did up.

But again, you know, the Jews get people riled up. They are threatening to stone Paul and Barnabas. They drive them out of the city again.

So they leave there. They go from Iconium to Lystra, which is not that far. I'm trying to remember, I think it was about 10 miles.

It wasn't that far. And I remember the same day that we were in Pisidian Antioch, we had a coffee in the afternoon. I accidentally left the waiter \$100 tip, but I managed to get it back.

He was a nice guy. But anyway, we drove across and ended up driving by Iconium. It's now a big city, kind of an industrial city.

There's no ruins there, really. I think it's called Konya now. But we headed on to Lystra.

We wanted to just see the ruins and get on to the next city, which wasn't Derby, but some other Turkish city to spend the night. So we get into Lystra at sunset. I mean, the sun is literally starting to set.

And we're racing into town. I'm driving. We race into town.

And there's a herd of cattle going right down the middle of Main Street. And I'm like, oh, great. You know, and we're just, you know, looking at our watches.

The sun's going down. And we don't even know where the ruins are at. This is a town called Hatun Saray.

And so I saw some guy standing there. I'm waiting for these cows. And I said, Lystra? And he's looking at me kind of weird.

And I said, Lystra. And he's like, whatever, mister, you know. And he said, Lystra? I said, yeah, yeah, Lystra.

And he said, he starts pointing. I said, come on, you know. And we just got him in the car.

He gets in the back of our car with these two Americans. This poor Turkish peasant guy out in the middle of Turkey. You know, some really simple folks out there.

He gets in the car, takes us to the ruins. It's just a mound. It had to.

Lystra was a small town, I guarantee you. It was small. So was Derby.

Just a mound. And so we go back into town. He brings us into all his buddies drinking tea.

And then we hang out with them. We end up spending the night in the town chief, whatever, or mayor, or whatever he was. Kind of the main guy in town.

Spent the night in his home. The next day, there was a wedding going on. So they invited us to stay for that.

They really treated us like royalty, you know. We're just a couple of bumbling Americans there. But we had quite an experience with those decent folks there in Turkey.

Just, they were good people, you know. And of course, we couldn't really communicate with them. Dave just kept saying, Michael Jordan, Michael Jordan.

I don't know what that was supposed to be about. But that's his way of communicating. And if you've ever heard him preach, you know it hasn't gone beyond that by much.

Okay, so they get there. They see a guy. Again, Paul fixes his eyes on him.

And he sees that he has faith to be healed. So they've been out preaching. Paul, again, is the preacher.

Barnabas is more in the background, probably praying. Paul starts preaching to these people that are gathered there, you know. And this is kind of an event for these outsiders to come into a little village like that.

Very much like Dave and me showing up in Hatunsuray, a couple of Americans, you know. I mean, it's an event. And so people want to hear what these strange men have to say.

And so when they see that this man gets healed, you know the story. They wanted to worship them. There was a local legend there that Zeus and Hermes had come down and visited the area, probably hundreds of years before was, you know, the story.

And had been there. So they erected a temple to Zeus there in that area. And, you know, but it's just a little podunk hamlet village there.

But anyway, the people, once again, the Jews show up, followed them from Iconium, a hundred miles away, followed them in their trail. And showed up there and stirred the people up against them. And they stone, I was going to say they stone Paul to death, which probably is what happened.

He probably was killed there. But anyway, whether or not he died and the Lord just brought him back to life, or what exactly happened, you know, they got up and ended up leaving. But the thing that's interesting to me in this story right here is the way that Paul and Barnabas reacted to when they wanted to worship them.

You know, and one of the writers said, scoff at us, fight with us, mistreat us, and we will endure. But do not make gods of us. Now that's someone who knows what ministry is all about.

Because there are always those people who want to worship you if you're a minister. Well, just if you're a minister. And you know, I've had people like that who latch on to me for whatever the reason.

And they just idolize me. And I run from that. I can't stand that.

Not only do I not want to be idolized, I don't want to be flattered. But also, I know that the more a person is given over to that spirit, the more quickly they can turn on you. And you know, the sad thing is there's a lot of preachers out there who live for that.

That is what it is all about, is getting people to adore you. They're not ministering as unto the Lord. They're ministering for self reasons.

They want to be the center. They want people around them who will worship them, adore them. But I'm telling you, it's a slippery slope.

Because when you get people to idolize you, that same spirit in them that wants to idolize you will quickly turn against you. Because that's just the way people are. And when you don't give them what they're

looking for in that wrong spirit, they're going to get very nasty with you.

All right, but in the midst of all this, there's a young man there in that town named Timothy. And later on, you know, Paul says, my own son in the faith. So we know that Timothy got saved by Paul's ministry, and almost certainly during this first trip through here.

And later, he's spoken of well by the brethren and stuff. And we'll get to that in a couple of weeks. But Paul, there was, you know, he's ministering there.

He's getting treated terribly. It's just a nothing little town. Who could have guessed? And you never know who you're dealing with.

You never know when there's a Timothy there. And some of the events that I've done in the past, you know, speaking events where God really came, people really affected. Maybe there's a whole lot of people there.

They feel very successful. Then you go to another place, it's dead. And, you know, hardly any response.

And yet in that crowd is a Timothy whose life is completely turned upside down. Well, one example I have is Gil, a little church in South Chicago, Cicero, right? Cicero. And just a nothing little church, not anything special or whatever.

But here's a guy who was affected by the message that day, ends up coming through the living program. And now we've had a faithful cook at the ministry for years because Steve Gallagher and Justin Carabello went to that little nothing church in South Chicago. And that's the way the Lord often works, you know.

So we have to be careful to maintain the right attitude with the people we're dealing with because you never know, you know, and you counselors, you never know some of the most difficult cases you have that person, the Lord can get ahold of them and turn things around. You just don't know. You don't know.

All right. So my notes are all out of whack now. Where am I at? So they get driven out of there.

They go on to Derby. Derby, like I said, is another small little town some miles away. Well, I guess it's like 60 miles from Lister.

So he's just been stoned to death or near death. And he's got to walk 60 miles. All right.

So they get over there. They do some ministering there. And then if they would have just kept going, they could have went straight down to Tarsus, got on a boat and went right home.

You know, now don't you think they've accomplished enough for one trip? I mean, think of all that they've done here. I would think that, man, you guys did great. But instead of just going on home, they turn around and retrace their steps.

Why? Because they know that there's some little pockets of believers that have grown up in these different places. And one thing I'll just mention in passing, verse 23 here, that they appointed elders in every church. And for years, I wondered, how could they appoint elders? They just got saved.

How could there be any elders? And one of the commentators just mentioned it in passing. I had never thought of it, that many of these men were Jewish men who had been in scripture since they were

children. So they were well-versed in the things of God.

And once God put his hand on their life, they came to the Lord or they continued with something that had already been kind of going on in an Old Testament fashion. They came into life. So they had years of scriptural background behind them, at the very least.

So they were probably the ones that were appointed as elders in these different towns and cities. So anyway, I was thinking about their trip home. You know, they finally retraced their steps, Pisidian Antioch.

And now they've got to walk all the way back down over the Pisidian Highlands, you know, catch a ship there in Perga and go back to Antioch, Syrian Antioch, where they were from. And I started thinking about that. How easy it would have been for them to be discouraged at that point.

I mean, think about Paul, for instance. He has been stoned. Now, he was probably in his late 40s when all this happened.

Mid-40s, late 40s. And so he's not a young guy anymore at this point. And he has just been... Have you ever been hit by a rock? I mean, it hurts.

And to be hit by a lot of rocks hurts a lot. And I mean, to the point of death. And you don't just get over that.

Unless maybe God touched him physically in some way and just completely freed him of it. It doesn't seem like that happened when he got beat and so on in different times. So he's beat up pretty good.

And now his eyes are messed up. So he's going back. He can't see right.

His body's beat. Everywhere they've gone, they've been hounded. They've been harassed.

They've faced hostility and hatred. And have very little to show for all their effort, really. I mean, on an outward sense, you know, maybe little pockets here or there.

They don't really even know, probably, how much they had to show for their efforts. You know, so they're going back home. But the bottom line is that there are some budding little pockets of Christianity in places that there wasn't any light before.

You know, that's the bottom line of it. I want to read this pulpit commentary quote, which is lengthy, but it's excellent. It has to do with the Pisidian Antioch experience.

Let me just read it. We have here a memorable example of the same gospel being a savor of life to some and of death to others, according to the reception given to it in the hearts of the hearers. Here was a mixed congregation of Jews and proselytes and Gentiles.

They had all the same advantages. They all heard the same gospel at the mouth of the same preacher. Some, when they heard, believed.

A hunger sprang up in their souls to hear and to know more of the salvation of God. They followed the soul. They followed the preachers out of the synagogue.

They hung upon their words. They listened to their exhortations. The next Sabbath found them in the synagogue again.

We can imagine that the pressing thought in their hearts was, what must I do to be saved? We can imagine how they struggled out of the darkness into the light of Christ. How the new message of redeeming love and justifying grace kindled new thoughts in their inmost souls. How they followed the words which led them till they found peace and life in Jesus Christ.

The gospel was to them a savor of life unto life. But others heard and believed not. Their conscience was not pricked with sin.

Their souls were not moved by the love of God. They did not yearn after more light, more knowledge of the glorious Lord. They were not humbled before the cross, but their self-love was wounded.

Their pride was aroused. Jealousy and hatred were kindled within them at the success of the gospel. They spurned the truth which would lower their importance.

They scorned the light in which their own glory would grow pale. They hated the goodness before which their own goodness withered into sin. They knew Christ only to contradict him.

They knew his word only to blaspheme him. The gospel of God's grace had come to them, but their last state was worse than the first. The gospel was to them a savor of death unto death.

All right, so this is what struck me. Look at the whole journey here. It probably took about a year, something like that, for them to do this.

These different congregations, these different places they preached, they're on their way home. Actually, they get home and look at the last couple of verses in 14, 27. When they had arrived back at Antioch, they gathered the church together.

They began to report all the things that God had done with them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles, and they spent a long time with the disciples. So can you hear the optimistic sense about what they accomplished? They're not dragging along with discouragement like, man, it was hard out there, and golly, hardly anyone listened to us. No, they knew that God had done something.

So take that whole trip with all the different people they preached to and tried to reach out to hundreds of people throughout all the places they've been. There were some who listened and obeyed and responded to the Lord, and there were many who didn't. In fact, there were many who were hostile to them, tried to kill them.

And that is a reality of ministry. That's what I want to leave you guys with today, because all of you here, and some of those watching by video, all of you here are involved in the work of God. Whether you're a counselor, hands-on, right face-to-face with people, or you're doing maintenance or administrative stuff, we're all in this together, this work of God here at Pure Life Ministries.

And this is just a reality. Not everyone who hears us is going to obey the Lord. Not everyone's going to respond.

And, you know, one of the problems that we can create for ourselves is when we get our hopes up too high, in a wrong sense, you know, get too optimistic. For instance, I'll share one of my big mistakes, was when I wrote Intoxicated with Babylon, back originally in 97, rewrote it in 2001. I remember when I wrote that, that revelation of what's in that book hit me so hard.

I thought that this is going to sweep the church, you know, and people by the thousands are going to be affected by this book and respond. And, you know, it's going to be all the talk on all the radio shows, and it's just going to create a buzz in the church. And I remembered a book Dave Hunt did many years before that, and it had that kind of effect, *Seduction of Christianity*.

And that's kind of what I was expecting here. But what I didn't realize was how far backslidden the church had become at this point. And they really weren't interested in that book and the message of that book.

And, in fact, I remember I was out to dinner with a publisher one night, and I was sharing with him the message of this book, and, you know, trying to get him excited about it, that he would publish it, get behind it, and really push it forward. And his response was, you know, you got to come up with a book that people really like, like how to lose weight and be spiritual at the same time. That's what he says to me.

And so he blew me off. And it was like, after that, it was just one disappointment after another after another. I mean, I prayed and prayed and prayed for months.

I would pour my heart out to God to use that book to affect many lives. And it just seemed like it was just a big dud, you know, like, man, wow, was that ever a waste? That's how it felt to me for a long time. But, you know, in the 17 years that we've had that book out there, every year, we sell something like maybe average, probably a couple thousand a year.

A couple thousand of those books going out every year. You know, and we have heard back from many, many people who have been deeply impacted by the message of that book. But many, I mean, you can go on Amazon and look at the book, and you'll see that there's people who criticize it, and there are people who, you know, love it.

There's no in between with that book. And that's really what I'm saying here, is no matter what we put our heart to, all we have to know is we're doing God's will. That's all that matters.

Once we have that settled, then we go forth with everything that we have in us. And if we will do things God's way, He will bring the fruit in His own timing, in His own way. And it may not be outwardly huge, but God will bring forth fruit.

I was thinking about a saying that Hudson Taylor gave, God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supplies. But I was thinking of a little different twist on that. God's work done in God's way, in other words, it's God's work, it's His will, it's His call to do this thing, whatever it is, done the way that we're supposed to do it, in the right way, and I would just say will never lack fruit.

There's always going to be fruit to show when you do things that the Lord has called you to do. Yeah, there'll be times when you're criticized, but you know what? I remember when I was in the Sheriff's Academy, they said to us, the only way to be absolutely safe not to get criticized is to do nothing, you know? But if you're going to be an aggressive cop, people are going to criticize you and so on. And that's just the way it is.

You have to lay it out there. You do the best you can. You throw yourself into it.

People are going to criticize you, but you just expect it. Just expect it. It's actually a good sign, you know, because people are rising up against that message.

But in the background, in a way that we don't always see, there's something going on in people's hearts. People are being affected. And later on down the road, you start to see what God has done.

And I was thinking about some of you. I could pull out any story, but since Robert is always one of my favorite targets, I was just thinking about when Robert came here, been at least 10 years, right? 12 years now. Terribly out of weight.

I mean, overweight. Addicted to psychotropic drugs they had given him. Couldn't imagine living without them.

He had just come out of a psychiatric unit because he tried killing himself. Talk about the last person you would imagine that God could do anything with. And yet he was responding.

I didn't even realize it at the time, but he was inside his heart was saying yes to the Lord. And now he's got this long track record of fruit that God has brought forth out of his life. Praise the Lord for Robert Rescher, you know, and his testimony, a powerful testimony of what God can do with a person's life if they will just respond.

But also a powerful testimony was to the work that his counselor, could you imagine what his, who was your counselor? Imagine what Jeff saw when Robert sat down in front of him. You know, he must have thought, what am I going to do with this guy? You know, I mean, sometimes that's the way it feels. It's like, why even put myself through this? No matter what the thing is.

But you just never know what God is doing. Praise the Lord. That is the way that God works.

And I'm just happy to be a part of it. Amen. So God bless you all.

Next week, we will get into the great debate with the Judaizers. God bless.

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