

Acts

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[0 : 00] We desire to depend upon the Lord as we turn to the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 14, reading verses 19 and 20.

The Acts of the Apostles, chapter 14, verses 19 and 20. And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.

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. This book, known as the Acts of the Apostles, has sometimes been referred to as the Acts of the Holy Spirit.

And truly that is so. Because by the hands of the Apostles, and by the ministry of the Apostles, wondrous things were done.

[1 : 47] God greatly blessed the ministry of Paul and Barnabas and Peter and others. Especially upon and following the day of Pentecost.

When following the ascension of the Lord Jesus into heaven, the promise of the Father and of the Son was fulfilled.

Namely, that he, the Comforter, should come. Not but that the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, was already in and with the Lord's disciples, as Christ said to them.

But although he would send the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, in the Father's name, and the Father would send him in Christ's name.

Yet, Jesus also said at the same time, Ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

[3 : 06] And all must be attributed to the Lord himself. Whatever instruments the Lord may use, and whatever he may please to do, by means of those instruments, the glory is the Lord's.

From beginning to end. Nothing is to be attributed to man, apart from him being raised up as an instrument.

But even then, there's one who raises him up. And that is his Lord, his Lord and his God. Now, Barnabas and Paul were amongst those teachers and prophets in the church at Antioch.

Others in that church are named in the first verse of chapter 13. How many such prophets and teachers there were in that particular church, we are not told.

But Barnabas was one of them, and so was Saul. Already possessing the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit came upon them in a special manner, in a greater measure.

[4 : 34] And the Lord said on that occasion, Separate me, Barnabas and Saul, for the work, whereunto I have called them.

And they went to prayer over this, prayer and fasting. And they adopted that custom that was then done, the laying on of hands.

And they sent them away. They sent them away, so they being sent forth by the Holy Ghost. You see?

They sent them away, the church did. So they being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed. And they went on this journey by sea.

They went to Seleucia. From thence they sailed to Cyprus, then other places. And it wasn't long before opposition arose through this man whom they found in one place, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus.

[5 : 52] He was a sorcerer. And he withstood the apostles. And he sought to turn away a deputy from the faith.

Saul, who was also called Paul. Saul evidently means a waster or destroyer. But Paul, the worker, worker, and he was that, once he destroyed the faith, now he works because of that faith.

Faith works through him by love and how he worked. Why, previously he worked in a way of destruction, now he works in a way of building.

Once he pulled down, now he erects. He is a wise master builder because his Lord has made him that. And he spoke very solemnly, did Paul, to this wicked man.

And yet through that, this deputy seems to have been brought to belief and faith in the Lord Jesus. The deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

[7 : 25] Proving, indeed, that all things work together for good to them that love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose.

Here was opposition. The apostles were withstood. But it all turned out for the furtherance of the gospel and for the glory of God.

But we mustn't stay too long on these preliminary things leading up to the text. Later on, they came to Antioch, the place to which they belonged, from which they were sent forth.

There they taught in the synagogues or in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. And Paul delivered quite a long sermon in that place.

How wonderful to think that in that sermon he exalts the Lord Jesus Christ whom he formerly persecuted in these words of his as taught by the Spirit to speak these words.

[8 : 45] be it known unto you therefore men and brethren that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.

And by him all that believe are justified from all things from which he could not be justified by the law of Moses.

And this sermon had a wonderful effect in that some were wrought upon by the Holy Spirit.

And to us it may appear to be a wonderful thing that some were not similarly wrought upon by the Holy Spirit. But such was the case.

in other words as we read of Christ there was therefore a division among the people because of him.

[9 : 44] It's always been so. It always will be so. A division between the precious and the vile. Within a man and outwardly too.

In a nation, in the world, separation, the religion, my friends, which God teaches, is one primarily and essentially of separation.

When the Holy Ghost quickens a sinner, the hitherto dead in trespasses and in sins, what is the result? The result, of course, is the desired and the designed end of God.

In his almighty work in that sinner, it is an end that separates, a work that separates. The end is separation.

God's aim, God's purpose or end, is separation. Wherever Barnabas, Paul, John, Peter, and others preached the gospel, there was separation.

[10 : 56] Some believed, some did not. God's so that any multitude we like to take, before the apostles came preaching the gospel, might be regarded as one, of one mind, in the world, of one mind, in the things of the world, of one mind, in sin.

sin. But, as soon as the truth made an impact upon the people, it had that separating effect.

Some believed, some remained in unbelief, some were quickened, others remained unquickened, and therefore dead, in trespasses, and in sins.

Wherever, therefore, the apostles went, this was the result. Same with the Lord Jesus, of course, wherever he taught, and preached, and ministered, there was this division, this separation.

And the apostles were no exception, of course, to that. So they came to Antioch, and Iconium, and then they came to Lystra.

[12 : 20] Lystra, where the miracle was performed upon this man, who was born lame, who never had walked.

Paul spoke to him. What did he say? Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked. Now, the effect of this upon the people generally was that they thought that these two men of God were gods, come down to us, said they, in the likeness of men.

They renamed Barnabas Jupiter and Paul Mercurius. the two apostles, it seems, had difficulty in restraining these people from doing sacrifice unto them.

And said to them, why do ye these things? We are men, men of like passions with you. And said they, e'er ministry to you, is that you should turn from these vanities unto the living God.

However, a great change came over these people, because through the influence of certain Jews who came from Antioch, where these two men came from, and Iconium, where they had been, and where the word was blessed, and not blessed, where they were received, and where they were rejected, through their persuading the people, it seems that a great change of mind came over them.

[14 : 22] Instead now of thinking them gods, and paying homage to them, it seems that these wicked Jews, who, it would appear, followed the apostles from one place to another, on purpose to stir up the people, and to blaspheme and oppose the things that they taught, through their influence and persuasion, Paul was stoned.

He says in his epistle to the Corinthians that he was once stoned, and it seems literally only once. He says I was once stowed.

This is the occasion. Now we've come perhaps in a long way to the text. There came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium who persuaded the people.

But this is just what Barnabas and Paul were doing. They persuaded the people. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.

Knowing therefore what an evil and bitter thing it is to sin against God, we persuade men. We preach the gospel, to men, that they should repent and seek the Lord if happily they might find him and so on.

[16 : 05] This was their purpose in life. Know that they had been separated by the Lord unto this work. And you see, wherever they went, they met with this opposition.

It must have been a great trial to them. Whereas in another place, being wary of the plan to stone them, they fled.

Here, it seems they were not able to flee. Barnabas is not singled out for stoning, but Paul certainly was. These people who would pay homage to the two men of God would now turn right against them and stone one of them at least.

Oh, how awful is the enmity of the natural mind and the natural man against the things of God, my friends.

How powerful and evil it is in our fallen nature. We mustn't think that we haven't this native enmity still. We have.

[17 : 26] Grace subdues nature, but doesn't turn it into something else. That is very clear from Paul's own words, especially in his seventh chapter to the Romans.

happens. You see, the work of God doesn't turn fallen nature into something else, something better. Paul, with all the grace he had, still must confess that in me that is in my flesh dwelleth no good thing.

And that will be the same right to the end. And if no good thing dwells in us, it doesn't mean that nothing at all dwells in us, it means that what does dwell in us is not good, and in fact, very, very wicked.

And what a trial this is to the people of God. Oh, if they had not a myself. Do you ever say that?

I do, more now than I used to. Oh, that I had not a myself. Well, one day you won't have, as you have now.

[18 : 46] You who fear the Lord, you who groan, being burdened, as again Paul says, we that are in this body, in this tabernacle, do groan, being burdened.

Burdened what by? Sin? Yes. and especially indwelling sin, not out-dwelling sin, but indwelling sin.

Is this your trial? Is this your burden? This was never a burden to a wicked person, to an ungracious person, never.

sin. No, sin is not a burden as sin to any, but to those who are called by God's grace.

If sin is a burden, I know you can't rejoice over that, rejoice over sin, or rejoice over the feeling and burden of sin, but we should rejoice if it has pleased God to convince us of their sin, because the end of God in that is that he will lead us to his dear son, whose precious blood cleanses from all sin.

[20 : 11] You see, the sin that is experimentally and effectually cleansed away is the sin that a child of God is convinced of.

Convinced as a sinner to Jesus I come. Well, you never would do that. You'd never want to come to Christ were you never convinced of sin.

Convinced as a sinner. Not convinced as a good man, but convinced as a sinner to Jesus I come.

Informed in the gospel for such, yes, for such sinners there is room. And let this further word from a hymn be an encouragement to us, that the vilest sinner out of hell who lives to feel his need is welcomed to the throne of grace the Savior's blood to plead.

And is that vilest sinner you and me dear friends? Paul knew himself to be the vilest of sinners in those words of his, that confession of his.

[21 : 31] This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world purposely, yes, on purpose, expressly, to save sinners, of whom, said Paul, I am chief, chief of sinners, less than the least of all saints, and the chief of sinners.

There came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, and they persuaded the people. Paul and Barnabas were persuading the people.

Now there's someone else to copy, to do the same thing, but are from a very different motive and with a very different end in view.

What was this persuasion? not to believe what Paul and Barnabas preached. Not to believe it.

It wasn't true. It was but make-believe. There was no such God as they spoke of. There was no such sin as they would persuade sinners of being guilty of.

[22 : 57] and no such thing as salvation from that sin, therefore. They persuaded the people. They got round them, got round them, in a most wicked and artful way, using their wicked talents to that end, that the people should take no notice of the gospel, that they should not be moved or affected in any spiritual manner by having this Jesus preached to them and extolled in the ministry of these two men of God.

They persuaded the people. What an evil persuasion it was. They persuaded the people of this city, Lystra, and no doubt also the same persons who were for doing sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas, and now to stone them, to stone Paul at least, to stone him.

Why? What evil had he done? think of the Lord Jesus, when some would stone him. For what good work do ye stone me?

And so for what good work, for what evil work, for what purpose do these people stone God's servant Paul? merely because they hated him.

And they hated him because they hated his God, and would not that he should reign over them. And when they used to stone people, it wasn't little pebbles such as we might pick up in their hands from the seashore, but great stones, great stones.

[25 : 14] And they stoned Paul. Why? How he must have suffered from that stoning physically, mentally, most of all, spiritually.

Had not God so recently separated him unto this very work in which he was engaged? how he must have suffered.

I wonder what thoughts went through his mind. Remember, as Paul said, we are men of like passions with you, who are sinners.

We have natural feelings. We know what pain means. tribulation is, and affliction, and suffering, and so Paul must have suffered tremendously from this stoning.

His bones were likely to be broken, his flesh broken too, broken, and bleeding. was it as bad as that?

[26 : 33] It must have been. If they supposed him to have been dead, they thought he was dead. Friends and foes thought he was dead.

He must have appeared dead. And they dragged him out of the city, as though to openly display to the onlookers the shame that they would see in this man, stoned, supposed to be dead.

They drew him out of the city. It seems that these evil men would not allow Paul's supporters and friends to attend to him.

even to bury him if he was supposed to be dead, thought to be dead, they dragged him out of the city.

Or we think of Christ, who within the city was judged, judged as a criminal, and the order was given that he should be killed, but though he was condemned within the city, he was taken outside the city to the place called the place of a skull, Golgotha that is, and there they crucified him.

[28 : 14] There they crucified him. They drew him out of the city. perhaps you feel to be drawn out of the city.

Perhaps you feel to be dragged along by Satan as a creature of fear, as one condemned, as one who can only be described as an outcast.

Zion, whom men call outcast, forsaken, look, doesn't this bring you though into union with such men as David?

No man careth for my soul. What if no man cares for your soul, so long as the Lord does? So long as the Lord does?

When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up. the blind man of John 9, why?

[29 : 21] He was cast out, and as soon as the Lord heard that he was cast out, he went to him, he found him, spoke to him, put his hand as it were a second time to the work he had commenced, asked him if he believed on Jesus.

Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that speaketh with thee. What a revelation of Christ that was to that man who was born blind.

Lord, said he, Lord, I believe, and he worshipped him. And you see, the trials that you and I are passing through, my friends, are to the end that we shall believe in him.

believe in him more implicitly, more implicitly. We hope we have been a believer in the Lord Jesus, since he made us such.

It's the Lord's work to make a believer. But you know, he will have his people to come closer to him. How does he bring us closer to him?

[30 : 38] Very largely through trial. and persecution and opposition and affliction, whether spiritual, mental, or in their circumstances.

And you see, these things reveal to us, at least the Lord reveals to us through these things, what would otherwise escape their sight.

And under his blessing, why do they not give new life to prayer? New exercise for faith? And bring about, in his good time and way, a closer walk with God?

Or have you prayed for a closer walk with God, my friends? Yes, you must have prayed that, you must have desired that, if you fear him.

That is one of the things that the fear of God will teach a man to desire and to pray for. But, the thing is, by what means will he accomplish this?

[31 : 44] It's bound to be accomplished in as much as you desire it. I ask the Lord that I might grow in grace and faith, in love and every faith or grace.

Now, how did that come about? It was in such a way, said the poet, as nearly drove me or brought me to despair. Nearly, not quite, not absolutely.

Do you not think that Paul and Barnabas might have thought like that? Did not Paul for himself and his co-apostles, we are sure as well, later on say this, that they were in deaths of, in many perils, perils of their own countrymen, perils of Jews, Gentiles, yes, but, as he also says in another part, what shall separate us from the love of God?

Peril, nakedness, a sword, and that includes this stoning, you see, or it does. Supposing he had been dead.

Now, this is the thing upon our minds, how be it? As the disciples stood round about him, he rose up.

[33 : 17] A little while before this, in the case of this impotent man, this lame man, why, Paul stood around him, and said to him, rise up.

Now, Paul himself is down and thought to be dead, and he has someone else to stand round about him, the disciples, the disciples of the Lord, those who loved him for his work's sake, and esteemed him very highly for his work's sake, and who loved him in the Lord, the disciples, the Lord's friends, Paul's friends, they stood round about him, doubtless they were looking down at him, probably mourning his death, and if he is dead, as they thought, is there any point in praying for him?

I know we are not told that they prayed for him, but if they were disciples brought into this great extremity, it would seem hard to believe that they were altogether prayerless, and did not send up to the Lord some urgent supplications, they must have done.

remember their own words, we are men of like passions with you. What would you have done in like circumstances?

Well, we needn't put it quite like that. What do you do in your present circumstances? What have you done in past circumstances when brought to a situation where everything outwardly is absolutely hopeless?

[35 : 26] Where you might suppose yourself to be spiritually dead, but everything come to naught, which isn't much, is it, naught?

What have you done in such a case as this? Things appear to be dead, hopeless, beyond recovery, but you still prayed, you still hoped, you still sought the Lord.

Don't you suppose therefore that they did? As they looked down upon the one whom they loved, God's dear servant, thinking him to be dead, I'm sure they also inwardly and spiritually looked up, looked up to another.

they were looking down surely, and they were also looking up just as surely, perhaps more surely. How be it, as the disciples stood round about him, remembering his ministry, loving him for his ministry, they must have sought the Lord.

And that being so, why the Lord appeared, the Lord appeared miraculously, he appeared quickly, as they were standing there around him, why he rose up, beyond all their expectations, if, in fact, they supposed him to be dead, which they did, so contrary to all their fears and expectations, why he rose up before their very eyes.

[37 : 26] You know, the Lord Jesus stands about and around his people when they're like this, when they are thought to be dead, when they think themselves to be dead, and all lost, the Lord is not far off, the Lord is at hand, the Lord is nigh, I believe he is more near to his people then, than he may be when they feel to be joyous and glad, because, you see, they need him to be near him then, and when the Lord's people have need, well, he's there to supply it.

Ah, you've proved that more than once, haven't you? My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

I had that word once, and another that accompanied it, namely this, the Lord, he it is that doth go before thee. well, you can't have more than that, can you?

You don't need more than that. There isn't more than the Lord to have. Oh, if you've got him, it doesn't matter what else, you have not.

Oh, if you've got him, you have an eternal and immortal store. You have a divine fullness in Christ, and in your feelings sometimes from Christ, who fills you with himself, and with his love that chases away your every tormenting fear, and when he kindly says to you, as I know, he said to me, fear thou not, for I am with thee.

[39 : 26] Do you feel to need one to stand about you? Ah, perhaps, no, you have rose up, the Lord has raised you up, and you have been blessed with praying friends standing around you.

Think of the time when Moses' hands were heavy, and through holding them up so long, Israel were on the retreat, the Amalekites were gaining the field.

Aaron and Hur, you remember, arranged for him to be seated. At the same time, they held up his two arms, which were heavy.

The result, why? The Amalekites now were losing ground, and God's people, the Israelites, they won the day, because, you see, there was support for Moses.

And there's something of a similar nature here, dear friends, and a wonderful thing it is, too. What a mercy to have, praying friends, whose prayers prevail, will, whose prayers, as it were, move God, move heaven, to perform wondrously on their behalf.

[41 : 03] As the disciples, it was as they stood around him, as they were standing there, he rose up. Is anything too hard for the Lord?

God. Oh, do not think that all is lost, even though all gives you that appearance. And there seems no other way of thinking or reasoning, but there is.

We might call that the gospel way, Christ's way, his way whom you love, and who loves you, poor sinner that you are.

Yes, oh, the Lord loves his people. They feel to be far off, nothing like his people, but for all that, they're still his people.

They seem to lack everything that a child of God ought to have. Lacking that, they say, oh, I can't be his, but I do want to be.

[42 : 10] Oh, it's a great thing, you know, to come to Christ spiritually, as the poet expresses it, nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling.

Perhaps you feel to have in you nothing but death. Now, remember, in that connection, what the same apostle Paul says elsewhere, we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus sake, that the life also of Jesus might be manifest in our mortal body.

Doesn't that sound strange? We which live are always delivered unto death, that the life of Jesus might be manifest in us.

Surely that's the very thing here. We which live, Paul, alive now, alive unto God and by the body of Christ dead unto sin.

Yet sinners haven't finished with him and sin is still in his members warring against the law of his spiritual mind. But we which live are always delivered unto death, delivered unto death, supposing him to be dead.

[43 : 38] For whose sake? Paul's sake? No. For that of Barnabas? No. But that of Christ, for Jesus sake, that the life also of Jesus might be manifest in us.

And that manifestation of the life of Jesus in us has this effect. We rise up. We rise up. In other words, they, you see, who dwell under Christ's shadow or shade, though beaten down with storm and tempest like the corn, shall revive like the corn.

They shall rise up through him who is for them and in them the resurrection and the life. Amen. Amen.