

Looking Ahead Through The Rearview Mirror On the Road Again, Literally



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Note: There are slides attached with corresponding numbers in the sermon.

This advertisement was found in a London Newspaper, *“Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful”*. The ad was signed by Sir Earnest Shackleton, Antarctic Explorer. Amazingly, the ad drew thousands of respondents, eager to sacrifice everything for a chance to be involved in some adventure that was life challenging and greater than themselves. Do you know that you have people just like that who are sitting near you right now. For example, Gottfried and Christa Schalm - Nigeria (50 plus years), Ormi and Freda Uptigrove - Haiti, Ed Schuster - China, Bob and Sheila Lever - Nigeria, and I could list others. They felt the call to be involved in something greater than themselves, or as the Assistant Abbott on the Isle of Patmos put it, when I asked him why he chose to become a monk, *‘he didn’t choose to be a monk, he simply responded to Jesus’ gracious invitation’*. As we continue our series on *Looking Ahead Through the Rear View Mirror*, we have come to Acts 13 in the story of how the resurrected Jesus was working through his people to ‘touch our world’. As you remember, Saul was a person who was focused on killing Christians and wiping out the Heresy called the Way. That was until he met the resurrected Jesus on the Road to Damascus and had a radical life change. Approximately 15 years later (48 AD), we find that after a powerful prayer time in a Small Group in the church at Antioch, Barnabas and Saul are about to do something that the Jewish faith has never even thought possible. They are about to go on a cross cultural missionary journey. They will be the first missionaries in history. This morning I want us to follow Saul’s First Missionary Journey, and then look at one way his experience can practically relate to our lives. This is an exciting journey!

Part 1: On the Road

Acts 13-14:28

(Slide #1) Antioch is 625 km north of Jerusalem. Some believe that over the life time of his ministry Saul traveled over 20,000 km by sea and foot. #2 We find in Antioch, and through much of the world, enclaves where the Jews were living, #3 places where Saul could travel and speak to Jewish people about Jesus. As we will see, Saul’s first stop in any town was to the Jewish Synagogue. #4 Tarsus, where Saul grew up was near the mountains, a beautiful university town,

#5 a river running through Tarsus. #6 Saul's trade was a tentmaker, tents like this #7 here is the Roman main road in Tarsus that dates back to Saul's time.

Antioch to Seleucia

Acts 13:3-4

#8 After 1 year of being the key preacher/teacher in Antioch, where at times they met in the cave church of Peter, #9 Saul and Barnabas are commissioned by the local congregation and take the Orontes River that runs through Antioch, down to the coast, and at the Harbour in Seleucia #10 set out to begin their 1st missionary journey. It must have a thrilling time for them. Two friends, having seen God work in Antioch in powerful ways, are about to do what no one has ever done before. Share Jesus with World.

Cyprus - Salamis

#11 They arrived in the harbour at Salamis on the Isle of Cyprus (Cyprus means "happy Island", it was a beautiful Island, but an Island where they worshiped Venus the goddess of love). They probably #12 walked through the Agora (Market) area of that city, and then preached in the Jewish Synagogue there. Then traveled the length of the Island (225 km) and came to the Roman capital of the Island called Paphos.

Paphos

Acts 13:6-11

Have you ever wondered why their first stop was on the Island of Paphos? It could be because this is where Barnabas came from so he had connections there, or had it been a dream that those on the Island of his birth would become followers of his Jesus. As they arrived in Paphos, the governor who was a very intelligent man named Sergius Paulus sent for them because he wanted to hear the word of God. This Roman had a respect for Jewish faith. However, the problem was that he had an advisor named Bar-Jesus who tries to interfere with Paul sharing Jesus with the governor. (Look at his name. The first person to attack Paul & Barnabas on their journey was a man named *Bar Jesus*. You can almost see the devil smirk as he uses the name *son of Jesus*. *Poor joke*). Paul using the gift of discernment realizes this man is not only into the occult, but is being used as a tool of the devil to stop Paul's ministry. So in the name of Jesus he turns to Bar-Jesus (Elymas) and with a word he becomes completely blind. I wonder if he thought back to his time of blindness, and hoped that Elymas would confront his spiritual

blindness during his physical blindness. The result is, Sergius Paulus becomes the first Christian Statesman to become a believer. From here Paul makes his way north to Perga, heading toward Antioch in the province of Pisidia.

Free Idea 1

Acts 13:1 A subtle change has happened in the last few verses; 13:2 *“Barnabas and Saul”* are sent out 13:9 *“Saul who was also called Paul”*, his Latin (Roman) is Paul, and he uses it when he talked to the Roman Sergius Paulus. 13:13 *“Paul and his companions”*, Paul is now the key speaker and has become the leader. 13:14 *“Paul and Barnabas”*, a shift in leadership has happened. Barnabas has been Paul’s teacher/sponsor, having seen Paul’s growing giftedness has gently passed the mantel of leadership to the younger Paul. Our job, especially as we grow older, is to help people grow in their giftedness, know when and how to generously help them grow, and then graciously freeing them to become the leaders God intends them to be. Support>> Mentor >> Encourage>> Free>> Follow.

Free Idea 2

[Slide #14] When we were in the Museum in Antioch in Pisidia, we came across this stone. On it in Latin is an amazing thing. It is the last name of the Sergius Paulus – only the first name was Lucious. Archaeologists (Mark Wilson) really got excited when they found this, because what they believe that a Sergius Paulus who became a believer on the Isle of Cyprus had a son named Lusious Sergius Paulus the Younger (and a daughter named Serga Paula) – who lived in Antioch in the province of Pisidia. So after becoming a believer Dad Paulus asked Paul and Barnabas to travel north to tell his son and daughter about Jesus. Here family ties are playing a crucial role in where the gospel of Jesus will be taken. Have you ever thought that God may have brought you into your extended family so he could touch some of them with the gospel of Jesus.

Perga - Pisidian Antioch

#15 So they crossed over to Perga, through #16 the Hellenistic Gates, north through the dangerous country #17 where robbers and thieves found travelers easy picking.#18 They were about to make this 160 km walk with an elevation change of 3,600 feet into the mountains near

Antioch #19. (there are 2 Antiochs, this is in the Pisidain province, the other is the province of Syria). #20 This was a very prosperous Roman city (it's Aqueducts ran for over 11 kms from high in the mountains dropping 2.6%, over 14650 ft. #21 It's Amphitheatre had a capacity for 12,000 people, #22 it's city was rich and beautiful and #23 it's Imperial temple was massive. When Paul and Barnabas entered the town the first thing they did was go to the Synagogue on the Sabbath. Possibly, because Paul's family were known in the city (due to trade with Tarsus) or because they heard Paul had studied under Gamalell, they asked him to speak at the service. Acts 13 has Paul's first recorded sermon. He begins in the OT and leads them to Acts 13:22,23 to Jesus Acts 13:26-30 (can you imagine listing to that line '*but God raised him from the dead*'), then he adds his proof in verses 31-32. The result was that (Acts 13:44) the next Sabbath the whole city came to church to hear about this Jesus. But the Jewish leaders in the synagogue began to interrupt him as he spoke, and they had to leave the service. But look what happened (verses 47-49). It is like a light comes on in Paul's mind. This gospel is truly powerful among the Gentiles (the outsiders), and 100's find a new faith in Jesus. But a group of powerful women spoke to some powerful people, and Paul and Barnabas had to leave town. Hopefully while they were there Sergus Paulus' son and daughter found faith.

Iconium

Acts14:1-7

(Slide #24) Next it was to Iconium, about 120 km away through the mountains. #25 Can you imagine how grueling their walk must have been. But some believe that with Paul's re-curing malaria that these higher climates were helpful for him. #26 Again they went to the synagogue where their preaching (verse 3) it says were accompanied with '*signs and wonders*', and great numbers of Jews and Gentiles (God fearers) believed Paul's words. But it wasn't long until that same Jewish narrowness kicked in, and they had to run for their lives because a plot to stone them had been hatched.

Lystra

#27 #28 Lystra wasn't that big of a town. Today its ruins lie under this hillside. As they entered the town they noticed a disabled man, who had been lame from birth, sitting there. Paul somehow grasped the fact (vs. 9) that he had faith to be healed. So Paul under the nudging of the Holy Spirit simply said '*stand up on your feet*', and instantly the man jumped up and began to walk. As you can imagine, it wasn't long until a crowd began to form, so Paul started to

preachm, but as he was preaching the audience started to move like a parade leading them toward the temple in the town. But Paul preached on, thinking '*isn't this great – they are amazingly open to what I am saying*', not catching on to what was really happening. Look at (vs.11-13) and let me stop there for a moment. You see, in the town of Lystra they had an ancient myth that at one time Zeus and Hermes had come to their region disguised as mortals. But all of the community had treated them badly, except for 1 older couple. So the gods in anger had killed all the people in the city, but this one couple they rewarded and made the guardians of the magnificent temple on the outskirts of their town. And when they died, the god's made them into two giant trees which stood guard over the temple. Now, with that in mind, look back at (vs. 11). Having seen the miracle that God did through Paul the people wanted to make sure that they didn't miss caring for these who they thought were visiting deities, coming for a second time to their town. So they called Barnabas Zeus because he was the big fellow, and Paul was called Hermes who is the god of eloquent speech. The parade started heading toward the temple where the sacrificial alter was; where the bulls could be sacrificed. #29.

Free

At the turn of the 1900's some scholars believed the New Testament was not written in the 1st century, and that many of the details in the scriptures were false. For example, they felt that the sacrifices mentioned here in this chapter could have only happened 100's of years before. A Scottish Archaeologist named William Ramses was working in Turkey around the area of Lystra. To this point in time no one could find the city and therefore many believed this story in Acts 14 was false. Then in 1885, Ramses came across a stone carving of a bull (fertility god) wearing garland (wreath) #30 and then another one #31 which were exactly what was described in this chapter. Using these clues ended up finding the town of Lystra. And the details of scripture were proved to be true again.

Back to the story: Once Paul had figured out that they were being worshiped he tried to stop the parade and speak of Jesus. But once they realized they were not gods the parade turned into a mob, and egged on by Jews who had traveled the 30 km. from Iconium. Verse 19 says they stoned Paul and dragged his body outside the city (I wonder if during the stoning – he thought back to Stephen's stoning, and thought to himself '*this almost seems fair*'). I can just hear one of Paul's friend ask '*do you know were Paul's body is?*', and someone replying "*you will find him about a mile out of the city laying in a ditch dead*". And so (vs. 20) says the disciples went

out of the city, found his crumpled body in the ditch, and as they stood there in grieving in shock Paul groaned, rolls over, his puffed eyes open one at a time, and they watch as he begins to stumble back into the same city that has just tried to kill him. This is one brave man. When I read this I think about how easy my life is as a Christian. I think of what I whine about and I say to the Lord, *'give me the strength to do what you ask me to do, and to keep going when I would rather quit'*.

Derbe

Acts 14:20-21

#32-#33 The town of Derbe, #34 the word Derbe is found on this stone. Here, after the pain of the last town, they found that a large number found faith.

Return trip

Acts 14:21-28

#35-#39 They traveled back through all the towns they had been in before, including Lystra, and after prayer they set aside Elders, strengthened the believers with biblical teaching, and ended up back in Antioch where (vs.27-28) occurred. Can you imagine the stories they heard that night? Can you imagine how thrilled the Church in Antioch was to have been part of calling these two men to take on this giant task. Can you imagine how they celebrated the goodness of God and how 100's had become believers in the resurrected Jesus. This afternoon as we have our meeting to dream about where God wants to take us as a church concerning missions we need to say, "please give us the privilege, the dreams and the courage to be like the church at Antioch. What a journey!

Part 2: Left in the Ditch

Let's get practical and bring this down to where we live. Most of us have heard the old Irish blessing *May the road rise up to meet you; May the wind be always at your back; May the sunshine warm upon your face; The rains fall soft upon your fields; and until we meet again, May God hold you in the palm of His hand*". Wouldn't that be great if that is the way life always worked? The reality is that sometimes the road does rise up to meet us with potholes or as in

Paul's case we almost fell like we have hit the road literally with our faces, and we feel more like road kill than those who overcome our struggles. I read this story of Paul and I wonder how he kept on going. Please realize that Paul has only started his journey here, let me tell about some things that he is about to experience. II Corinthians 11:21-28 By the way here is a little tid-bit he left out. (II Timothy 4:17) So when in Galatians 6:17 Paul says “.. *I bear on my body the marks of Jesus*’ and he isn't kidding or exaggerating.

In the book Paul by Walter Wangerin Jr. there is a paragraph which describes Paul trying to get up in the morning. You see, because of all the beatings, the stoning, the 5 times he has been flogged, unless someone massages the knots out of his back 1st thing in the morning Paul is unable to physically stand up and get on with his day. And as the person is helping Paul in this way, they see the scars from the rocks, the lashings, the rods and they begin to weep.

But to be honest, as I have sat in my office and heard stories of abuse, the loss of loved ones, the rejection of friends and family, the actions of co-workers, the dreams that have been broken in some peoples lives, and the actions of others (even some Christians), I see similar scars on many of us. Like Paul in the ditch outside of Lystra I wonder how in the world you will be able to get up let alone summon enough courage to go back into those places where you have been hurt. I also know that in life there will be times when all of us will feel like we have been left in pain in the ditch all alone.

Red and White Martyrs

In the book of Martyrs it speaks about two kind of martyrs, Red which are those who gave their live blood, and the White Martyrs, those who give their life every day for what God calls us to. Few of us will be asked to shed our blood for Jesus, but I can tell you from experience there will be a few times in all of our lives when God will call you to faithfully give your life in specific situations for a set period of time, when it won't be a picnic. But the promise is “*He will never leave your or forsake you, He promises.*”

Courage Is...

So can I remind you what Courage is? In Paul's day it literally meant ‘Living from your Heart’: That was Paul's secret. His heart was so entwined with God that when God nudged him to be involved in an area which would be hard he understood that God would walk with him through

whatever was about to happen. So he was able to keep on going, even through those tough times.

I want to take you back to Acts 13:52, this happened right after. In the midst all that God had been doing in Antioch in Pisidia, they had to flee for their lives. (vs. 52) Here was one of their secrets: they chose what they would look at. You know from life that at times life is tough, and there is always another thing that needs to be done, therefore we need to choose what we will look at. Paul and Barnabas chose. They decided to look at the wonderful fact that many had been saved in that town, the gospel was working in a Gentile context, and that God had a plan. And as they chose what to look at they found the courage to go and make a difference in another town.

Application

Never miss that your life, even during the tough times can have a profound impact on others.

Acts 14:19-20 No one present at that road side ever forgot that day, that picture of courage, and how God would always be enough. Reading that again challenges my heart.

What a journey! What an example! Look at what the Resurrected Jesus can do in an individual's life ... our world.

Here's another exciting book by one of our SIM missionaries. **Gottfried & Christa Schalm** are parents of MKs Markus, Michael, Dorothea, Annegret, and Christina. In *God's Pathways*, Schalm recalls his life as a Polish man who served in Hitler's army, who found Christ during his 3 1/2 years in a POW camp, and how in 1955 he became a missionary in Northern Nigeria. You'll read fascinating accounts of the early years establishing a church in the remote village of Adunu and find first-hand testimony of God's redemption story over the years.

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