

Acts 13:42-14:10

Acts 13:42-52 – A Drama Human and Divine

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ... Remember the word that I said to you: A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. John 15:18&20, ESV

v.42: "... begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath" It was the prerogative of the rulers of the synagogue to invite teachers to address the gathering.

v.43: "And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up ..." Some other translations read 'dispersed' rather than 'broke up', and some commentators have speculated that the rulers of the synagogue saw to that dispersal themselves out of prudence.

v.43: The 'converts to Judaism' here would have been God-fearing Gentiles who had fully embraced Judaism and been converted according to Jewish law. That certainly would have made them the 'prized students' of the rulers of the synagogue.

Note 1 From FF Bruce

In these verses we see the root of the problem that would occasion the writing of the epistle to the Galatian churches.

vs.48-49: Here we see two responses to the gospel that we should see in the lives of everyone on whom God has poured out his grace. First, they believed. Second, they spread the Gospel.

vs.50: Historians and rabbinic scholars tell us that it was not uncommon for certain Jewish men to begin each day giving thanks that they were not born a woman, a Gentile, or a dog. There is an irony here that the rulers of the synagogue reached out to people they disdained in order to prevent the spread of a gospel that would erase distinctions when it came to human worth. There is a greater and more tragic irony in the fact that the women joined their cause. *Ramsay notes that what happened here in Pisidian Antioch couldn't have happened in a city like Athens, but was in perfect keeping with the culture of the region. It becomes part of the testimony to the accuracy of Luke's record that his account perfectly fits the time and place in which it was set.*

v.51: *And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town. Matt. 10:14-15 ESV*

v.42: 'And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit' – Even though the persecution was sure to continue and they were saying goodbye to their spiritual fathers.

As we've read and talked through these verses we've looked at a picture of human drama and contrasted it with the dramatic work of God taking place at the same time in the same place. As we close this section, we affirm that even the human drama was God's drama in the end, as he worked and continues to work all things to His glory. We'll see further fruit here before we finish Chapter 14.

Acts 14:1-10 Dependence and Sufficiency

v.2: 'But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.' The same persecution that drove them from Pisidian Antioch begins again in Iconium.

For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us not rely on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead. 2 Cor. 1:8-9

v.3: As they spoke boldly, their reliance was on God. It was God himself who bore witness to the message of his grace and God who enabled them to perform signs and wonders.

v.6: Verse 6 implies that Iconium is not in Lycaonia. (FF Bruce Note 2)

v.7: 'and there they continued to preach the gospel.' The God-given boldness of these men cannot be overstated. They fled from persecution in Pisidian Antioch to a near stoning in Iconium and yet continued to spread the gospel. We like to say 'Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me'. May God give us all the boldness to be this kind of foolish for him three times and more.

v.8: Here we see a three-fold emphasis on the man's disability. He 'could not use his feet', he 'was crippled from birth', he 'had never walked'.

vs.9-10: (FF Bruce Note 3) Consider the manifest sufficiency of God's power. Not only was the man healed of his original condition, muscles that had never been used were filled with strength and a mind that had never commanded legs or balanced a body on feet now directed that body to jump, to spring up, and to begin walking.

We may be given a burden we cannot bear. We may be in a state of absolute dependence on God. But the God on whom we are absolutely dependent is absolutely sufficient. So then, let us take this promise of His as true and reliable:

And I am certain of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Phil. 1:6 ESV

Notes from FF Bruce's
The New International Commentary on the New Testament:
The Book of the Acts (Revised)
10-13-13

- 1) During the following week, the Gentiles who had heard Paul's address spread the news through the city to such good purpose that on the next sabbath a great crowd of Gentiles turned up at the synagogue. Knowing (as we unfortunately do) how regular Christian worshipers can manifest quite un-Christian indignation when they arrive at church on a Sunday morning to find their customary seats occupied by rank outsiders who have come to hear some popular visiting speaker, we can readily appreciate the annoyance of the Jewish community at finding their Synagogue practically taken over by a Gentile audience on this occasion. But there was a further reason for their annoyance: these Gentiles were plainly disposed to give a favorable hearing to a message which they themselves, for the most part, found unacceptable. Many Jews, according to the narrative, did welcome the gospel as Paul had proclaimed it the previous sabbath, but the majority, and especially their leaders, had no use for a salvation which was open to Gentiles on the same terms as Jews. It was just this, indeed, that aroused their opposition. So they spoke out in an endeavor to refute Paul's arguments, and cast unworthy aspersions on the missionaries (perhaps including the name of Jesus in their defamatory remarks).

- 2) Sir William Ramsay has recorded how it was this geographical note that led to his "first change of judgment" with regard to the historical value of Acts. Xenophon, to be sure, in 401 B.C., refers to Iconium as "the last [i.e., most easterly] city of Phrygia," but writers such as Cicero and the elder Pliny who lived much nearer to apostolic times, call it a Lycaonian city. Ramsay at first assumed, as others had done, that the author of Acts, wishing to add verisimilitude to an account of events in an area with which he was not personally acquainted, borrowed from Xenophon the information that Iconium was in Phrygia, not realizing that the regional frontier had shifted since Xenophon's day. But further acquaintance with both literary and epigraphic evidence convinced him that the statement in Acts was entirely correct, that Iconium was as Phrygian a city in the middle of the first century A.D. as it had been 450 years earlier. ... Those writers who refer to Iconium as Lycaonian do so loosely because it lay near the frontier of Lycaonia and commonly shared the fortunes of that region.

- 3) Yet, as Paul was preaching, he saw this man listening to him and recognized that he "had faith to be made well." While the expression here refers to the recovery of bodily health, yet even in a pagan context "there lies latent in it some undefined and hardly conscious thought of the spiritual and the moral, which made it suit Paul's purpose admirably." In Acts, as in the gospels, faith is regularly emphasized as a condition of receiving both physical and spiritual healing. That this lame man had faith was made plain by his ready obedience to Paul's command to stand up: he jumped to his feet, found that they supported his weight, and began to walk for the first time in his life.