

# "How to get Stoned"

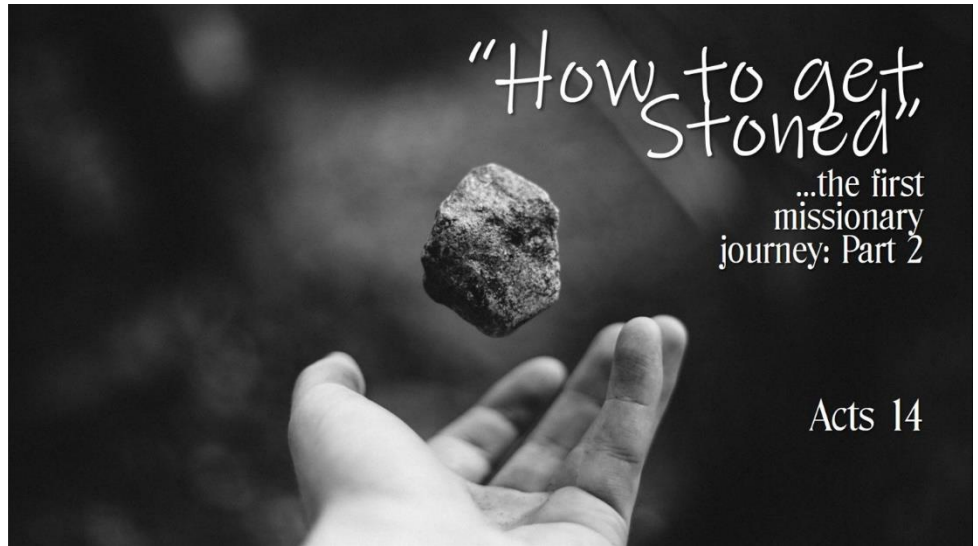
*the first missionary journey, part 2*

- Acts 14 -

by Pastor Tim Dodson  
at JF Believers Church  
in Menomonie, Wisc  
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*1 Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed. 2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren. 3 Therefore they*

*stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. 4 But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles. 5 And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them, 6 they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region. 7 And they were preaching the gospel there. 8 And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked. 9 [This] man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, 10 said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked. 11 Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian [language], "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" 12 And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 13 Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes. 14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out 15 and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, 16 "who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. 17 "Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." 18 And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them. 19 Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul [and] dragged [him] out of the city, supposing him to be dead. 20 However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. 21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting [them] to continue in the faith, and [saying], "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." 23 So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. 24 And after they had passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. 25 Now when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. 26 From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed. 27 Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. 28 So they stayed there a long time with the disciples.*



On January 23, 1999, in Keonjhar, Orissa India, an **Australian** Christian **missionary**, Graham Stuart Staines, along with his two sons, Philip (aged 10) and Timothy (aged 6), was burnt to death while sleeping in their jeep. by members of a Hindu fundamentalist group,

On January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1956, James (Jim) Elliot, a Christian missionary, was one of five men killed during missionary operations attempting to evangelize a tribal people in Ecuador.

On June 5<sup>th</sup> of this year a 14-year-old Christian boy was crushed to death with stone by a group of people in the Kenduguda village in Naxal-infested Malkangiri district of (Orissa) Odisha. The boy was confronted concerning his beliefs but would not renounce Christ. The minor's body was allegedly chopped into pieces and buried. The victim and his family including his father had adopted Christianity three years ago.

Currently 11 Christians die each day around the world for their faith in Christ. More than 3,000 Christians were killed worldwide last year for their faith, twice as many as the previous year, a report by the charity Open Doors has found. British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt recently released a report which says that the persecution of Christians in parts of the world is at or near "genocide" levels. The review, led by the Bishop of Truro the Right Reverend Philip Mounstephen, estimated that one in three people suffer from religious persecution. It found that Christians were the most persecuted religious group in the world.

An underground church leader said, through the ministry of Catalytic Ministries, “*What we do is an executable crime in the countries where we work.*”

Despite the opposition that these men and women experience, it appears that they were and are undeterred. For these individuals and thousands more like them, the mission of Christianity was and is to be lived fully submerged and persecution and hardship is simply a normal aspect of living for Christ. How different we see faith here in America. In most cases and with most churched Americans, we roll over in a breeze, let alone due to any real fires of testing. We are ruffled at the smallest inconvenience and offended by the slightest pushback. We leave our churches over any uncomfortable situations and close our mouths at any hint of contrary opinions. More than one family has sat in my office for the last time explaining that they simply had to leave to “find something easier.” Someplace where “our family will feel safe.” We are angered over the smallest issues and smallest discomfort.

*“Man...I can't believe they are making me wear a mask against Covid, I'm out of here.”*

*“I'm not being appreciated enough here...they aren't giving me a position or backing me in what I want to do, I'm gone.”*

*“How dare they pull me aside to talk to me about my living...my family...my priorities! I don't have to take that! Who do these guys think they are? Making me serve Jesus and expecting me to financially support the work! I have a life ya know!”*

Ahhh...and the list goes embarrassingly on! It's interesting that the issue is never “they aren't teaching the Word” or “that's not biblical.” No, it is universally some petty and selfish slight they “feel” and they aren't interested in an “uncomfortable Christianity.” Carrying a cross and dying to self is simply not part of their agenda. The distance between *these* individuals (that we read about) ...along with the account we have before us and what we call Christianity in the west today is light years apart. Men and women who gave their living and in many cases ultimately gave their physical lives for the mission of advancing the kingdom of God. So “*Houston, we have a problem...*” Clearly, both of these versions of Christianity cannot both be true. Where have we lost our way?

As chapter 14 opens, Paul and Barnabas were on a roll. They were in one of those memorable moments in a person's ministry...the “thin places” where the Spirit rolls and lives are changed. But as always, such ministerial success's do not go unnoticed by the forces of evil. It seems that that is the part we just can't get through our heads. That this is not a club, ***it is a war.*** And Satan ...your adversary...is “*walking about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*” (1Pe 5:8) So we are thus called to “be sober”... to “be vigilant...” Satan and his gang have been unrelenting since the garden. Creative they are not. But they *are* unrelenting. Their methods of attack are old school, but eminently successful. Appeal to a person's ego, his emotions, his pride, and he gets us. Every time...

These servants of Satan...often even with a Jesus fish on the back of the cars, “stirred up the people” by “poisoning their minds against the brethren” the text says. They do this through whispers, back alley remarks, and unsubstantiated accusations. Such acts seem rather trite, but Satan has always understood the nature of man, and mankind loves to hear about the dirty laundry of others, even if it is just a mere *suggestion* that there is some dirty laundry. Satan knows that man will always believe the negative long before he believes in the positive. We are such suckers. We fall for it every time! He knows also that to appeal to peoples pride and emotions will always get traction too.

Barnabas at this point in his ministry was...practically speaking, being moved to the “second position” behind Paul. He must have been a great man and a dynamic servant to continue moving in ministry, despite the fact he

wasn't the "main man" anymore. Apparently the message and the mission was more important than any position he might have achieved or retained! Clearly, it was not about HIM.

Verse 1 says they "went together." Such unity in spirit and service is what the body of Christ is all about. Some people just find it impossible to serve in the company of others, especially if someone is outshining us. Our pride demands a solo run, so we will have "solo credit." Such individuals will fail to ever put a dent in the battle for the Kingdom.

The unbelieving Jews were the human culprits here. But don't get the idea that these were pagans or even secular Jews as we have today. The word "unbelieving" is literally interpreted as "disobedient." It was not that Paul and Barnabas did not have the facts and data to present a convincing case. These people simply *refused* to believe. This is what the bible means when it speaks of "casting pearls before swine." With *their words*, these troublemakers "poisoned the minds" of the people against Paul and Barnabas.

Despite the push back, Paul and Barnabas were undeterred. A soldier for Christ learns early that we have no control over such worldly attacks. Our "defense" is in the hands of our General. Because of their success, the text tells us that Paul and Barnabas "stayed there a long time." Why not? When the fishing is good, why move to another location? People were saved and people were baptized. I can't help think about a fella that Pastor Dave showed to the door many years ago. In his arrogant anger, his last words were "this church is finished...you all are never going to make it." He's across town now. I wonder what he thinks as he drives by after 30 years, and sees our footprint in this community?

These two guys seemed to have no concern about being popular or politically correct: *the things that are seemingly the driving force in western Christianity*. They didn't soften the message of gospel, instead they spoke "boldly in the Lord." They taught of God's grace, and they did so "with power."

There was...and still is...a quite natural division amongst the people. There always was because of Jesus, and there always will be. Scripture tells us "...*there was a division among the people because of Him.*" (John 7:43) "*The name of Jesus has always been like a sword which divides.*" (Luke 12:51-53) It is the same throughout history in a million situations and yet the greater church today is constantly attempting to make peace with an unbelieving world. Through political and social endeavors, the family of God is so quick to attempt unity with the world and so slow *if ever* to seek it with their brothers and sisters outside their own church.

"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;" (1Pet 2:9)

Paul and Barnabas may have been gutsy, but they weren't stupid. For "wisdom is the better part of valor," and when things turned violent they beat a hasty exit. Certainly, there's a fine line between boldness and suicide! Notice that this angry mob contained both Jews and Gentiles. Strange bedfellows for sure, but remember the old saying... a practical truth-ism for sure, "*the enemy of my enemy is my friend!*"

A faithful servant of God must prepare himself or herself for opposition from multiple fronts. The individual that stands firm and unmoving in the Word of God will bear the wrath of the world on one side and the stubborn self-righteous attacks of prideful religionists on the other. It can be an unnerving place to be!

In verses 5 and 6, Paul and Barnabas exit "stage right" only to resurface again in another location. No time to waste. They didn't attempt to retire with the statement, "I've done enough." They weren't looking for a war-free zone, they were just looking to stay alive to keep ministering. They continued to "preach the gospel."

When should you stand, and when should you run? Who knows! There seems to be no easy answer to that question. One could only advise the same practice that seemed to be an essential ministry element of these men: pray a lot!

In verse 8 we have a man that would have been glad that Paul “bowed out” of Iconium. Because Paul stayed alive to minister another day, this individual who had never walked would now walk through the healing power of Jesus Christ. Apparently he heard Paul speak and had the faith to be healed. Once again, faith is not **the** innate power, rather the trust and belief **in** that power.

Paul exercised the unique gift of discernment that is essential to be found in every minister! It is the Spirit of God communicating essential information about a situation to the servant. That doesn't say a man is perfect and will never blow a call. But if such a gift is manifested in your leaders it should illicit a high degree of trust and backing even if we don't understand why a call was made. Paul, exercising this gift, realized that this guy was the “real thing.” There are always those who are merely curious, and those who are stopping by just to see what this whole “religion” thing is all about. But Paul knew the difference and calls this man to exercise his belief, *and he did...*

Because of the miracle displayed before them, the people suddenly thought that Paul and Barnabas were gods themselves. This event is really not that farfetched. Man has always erroneously given credit for such works to the men that wielded them. Certainly, it would have been very easy for these two guys to reason within themselves that they could personally capitalize on this opportunity. Such is a “bridge” that all of God's servants will cross. Some will make it, some won't. Some *didn't*. For here lies an inherent danger in ministry for us all: *the awesome and powerful draw to self-deification*. The temptation to take the glory for our-selves. We all experience it on some level. Then there are those pinnacle defining moments of our lives where we stare such opportunities in the face. Paul and Barnabus had come to just such a crossroads.

Many souls will reason out this flesh enticing opportunity in their own minds in all sorts of ways. We could tell ourselves that we would not abuse such a position. That it is better than the people being superstitious pagans, after all. That we could do some good with such power. And the list goes on and on. Because of the *wrong* decisions, we get cults, false religions, and some worthless denominations. But because of the *right* decisions, we get the Paul's of this world, and all the glory they bring our Creator!

Paul was one who didn't seem to even flinch at such a decision. We have no record of him stopping to ponder this paradox before him. He just acted. *It was almost as if he had already made up his mind long before he got there. It's as if he remembered that Damascus road...*

Making that firm decision long before the opportunity comes knocking is the key to being a Paul instead of a “David Koresh.” *Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.* (1Cor 10:31) Because Paul “passed the test,” he went on to write the lion's share of the New Testament and to lead thousands to Christ; then **they** went on to lead hundreds of thousands more to Christ. Paul went on to be Paul, and he didn't die in a shoot-out on a remote farm in Texas nor does he commit suicide while waiting for the “mother ship” to appear from the far side of the Hale-Bop comet. (Marshall Applewhite and HeavensGate) It is all because he didn't try to steal the glory. We are reading **his** story, because he made the right decision.

One cannot help but think that Paul and Barnabas, as well as many evangelists that followed, would have maybe had far greater success...certainly less worldly troubles, if they had just stayed on their side of the street. One moment the people desired to recognize Paul and Barnabas as gods, and the next they tried to kill them! A vivid

picture of the fickle nature of mankind! Paul was facing carnality on one side and paganism on the other. It seems to be a “no win” scenario. The “multitudes” stoned Paul and, supposing he was dead, dragged his body outside of town. If only he had just found a church that was quieter and less on mission.

We will never know what happened that day until we are in the eternal realm, but there is certainly evidence that Paul did indeed die that day in Lystra. Many commentators believe that this was the event that Paul spoke of in 2 Corinthians 12:2-3:

*“And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows  
— how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”*

It would be easy to get lost in the awe of this miraculous event, and miss what is a grand testimony of Paul’s spirit filled tenacity. We certainly don’t want to minimize a return from the dead—God does good work!—but one must admire Paul’s gutsy response to such adversity, for the text tells us that “he rose up **and went (back) into the city.**” Nothing like a good beating down aimed at you to “separate the men from the boys!” The “boys” just find another church. One that is safer. One that is easier.

Paul and Barnabas, apparently now protected by a shroud of perceived supernatural powers, continued to “preach the gospel.” You have to figure that a lot of people would be like “*who IS this guy?*” They did not only show people the path to salvation, but obeying Christ’s last directive in the book of Matthew, they went out and “made disciples.”

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them  
in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” Matt 28:19*

Vs 22 tells us that Paul and Barnabas...despite what came at them, still went out and “preached the gospel.” And by doing so, they “strengthened the souls” of these new disciples. They didn’t just *encourage* them, they *exhorted* them. This means they powerfully corrected them and called them to live out a diligent faith. They could have painted a rosy picture of Christianity, one without adversity or difficulty, but such a faith is only lived in the midst of trials and “tribulations.” Real Christianity is lived out in the fires. No one knew that fact better than Paul in Lystra.

Paul was not on this missionary journey solely to win converts to the faith, but also to establish working churches. Please note that priority. He didn’t send out these converts to fly solo, and operate alone. No, despite those who desire to erase this fact in a modern atmosphere of religious isolationism, Paul planted churches, appointed leadership in each body of believers and turned them over to God’s oversight.

At the end of this chapter, we see that Paul and Barnabas had made full circle on this first missionary journey, and have now returned home. Home. Back at church. Back with those who were supporting them and had sent them out. They shared with the believers the events of their journey, a fitting response to those who had joined them every step of the way. Not in body, but in prayer and financial support. They had, after all, gone on this mission together. Some out front, and some in the back, but they all played their part, and no one “kept their head down” and remained out of the fray.

This is the blessing as well as the design of the local church! Paul and Barnabas were ***blessed by*** and ***accountable to*** their brothers and sisters in fellowship. There is no doubt that together they rejoiced and celebrated God’s grand work and the part they each were allowed to play. This could never take place in an atmosphere of solitude. No...this was a church on mission.