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THE CONCLUSION OF PAUL'S SERMON AT LYSTRA
(First Missionary Journey Continued)

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 57
ACTS 14:17-20

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ACTS 14:17-20 "Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them. 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."

After the miracle performed in the healing of the cripple man at Lystra, the people got very confused and concluded that Paul and Barnabas were not ordinary human beings but were some kind of gods. These South Galatians were very anxious to have some special visitation from the gods, since their neighboring states had had such in their tradition. So they were going to throw a big holiday and sacrifice oxen to Paul and Barnabas. But we will see Paul and Barnabas put a stop to this kind of thing, much to the disappointment of these disillusioned people. This means that the population is now ready for an about face in mental attitude. One minute they are ready to offer sacrifice to them, and the next they are ready to stone them. We learn from this that people are fickle and can change their opinions with the least little cause. (Illustration--Just like in a football game. One Saturday the quarterback can do no wrong and he is acclaimed as a great hero. The next Saturday the quarterback can do nothing right and the people are almost ready to stone him. One week he is a hero, the next week he is a bum. The same people who cheered for him one week want his head the next.) Now this is the situation we find here in Lystra.

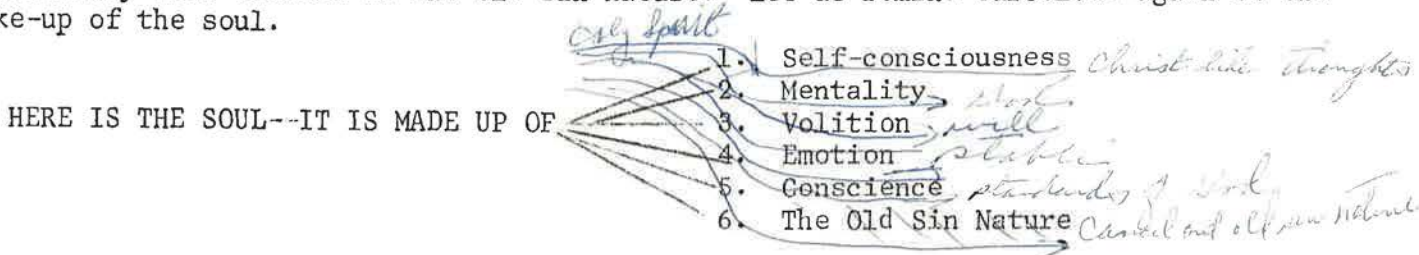
ACTS 14:17 "Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." This is the speech Paul made in Lystra as he restrained these excited people from offering sacrifices to them. This part of his speech needs analysis for it has some very important doctrine in it.

Notice the phrase "He left not himself without a witness". This means that Jesus Christ has been revealed in all the centuries. The Saviour was revealed long before he came to the earth in physical form. We have some difficulty here because we do not have words for the Son of God. We simply call him Jesus Christ, but Jesus Christ is not English at all, just a transliteration from the Greek. Jesus is equivalent to the Hebrew Joshua, and Christ is equivalent to the Hebrew Messiah. So actually in Hebrew it would be Joshua-Messiah. He is also known as Elohim, but this refers to the 10 Essence qualities of God and can refer to all three persons of the Trinity. Then when the person of Christ is to be emphasized, we have the Tetragrammaton (The four letters for the word Jehovah which are too sacred to be pronounced) which is translated Jehovah or Lord. But generally when Jehovah is used it does not refer to God the Father or God the Holy Spirit, but to Jesus Christ. The Levitical offerings, the holy days, the furniture in the Tabernacle and the Temple all spoke of Christ and revealed Christ. So the principle is simple when Paul said, "God hath not left himself without witness". He means that God gives the people an awareness of himself. There are many ways a man reached God-consciousness, and if that man goes on positive signals, then God will see that the message is sent to him. When a man is willing to believe, then God gives him the message so he can be saved. At the cross all human good was rejected and all the sins of the world were poured out on Christ. Christ on the cross satisfied the righteousness and justice of God and made salvation possible by way of the cross. There is only one way to be saved and that way is Christ. Adam and Eve were saved by faith in Christ, Abraham was saved the same way, and Moses and

all the other believers in the Old Testament. All of those who have been saved on this side of the cross have been saved in the same way. There has always been a revelation of God through Jesus Christ. This is what that phrase means "He left himself not without a witness". Now in the phrase "In that he did good" refers to divine good and not to human good. This is what Christ did on the cross. It was divine good. So all human good is excluded. This means that all human works are discarded or ignored as far as our salvation is concerned. In Lystra the people were heathen and were here participating in a heathen festival to honor these men they thought to be God.

So this gives Paul a chance to show them that man can't do anything to impress God. There is nothing in human works and God is not going to allow his divine plan to be usurped by human good. Only the work of God can satisfy God. Grace is the work of God and is perfect. There is no place for human work in the plan of God. The South Galatians, to whom this is addressed, are heathen people. So Paul had to start out in simple terms to explain to these heathen people just how God operates, and being an agricultural economy, he is going to start with an illustration they can easily understand. "Gave us rain" is present, active, participle and means that he keeps on giving us rain. "He left us not without a witness" is an aorist tense and means that far back there in a point of time Christ was given for our redemption. This means that from Adam to the end of time, when people go on positive signals, God always furnishes them information so they can believe. This aorist tense also means that at any point of time in history when anyone believes, in that moment he is saved. God is absolute good, perfect good. Rain falls on the just and on the unjust. Rain falls on the believer and on the unbeliever, and this is a perfect picture of the perfect grace of God.

The phrase "filling our hearts with food" need explanation. You don't fill your heart with food. Food goes to the stomach. What does this mean? Well, let's ask the question "What is man really like?" Well, we know that man is a soul. You are born with a soul, but not with a human spirit. You are born with a body which is the mechanics for your physical life. But the real you is a soul, but the soul is spiritually dead because of the old sin nature. Let us remind ourselves again of the make-up of the soul.



Now many of these people in Lystra have accepted Christ as Saviour. When people are saved, the Holy Spirit comes in to dwell, and the human spirit is reactivated. The Human Spirit has thousands of empty shelves, and as you learn doctrine, you begin to fill these empty spaces and finally you will grow into a mature Christian. This is the glorious joy of Christian growth and development. The Human Spirit has pipes that run to these characteristics of the soul, and if the Holy Spirit is in control of your life and is guiding you, then truth moves through these pipes to these characteristics of your soul.

Illustration--If the Holy Spirit is guiding you in your self-consciousness, then you become occupied with Christ, but if the Holy Spirit does not flow to your self-consciousness, then you get pride or selfishness or self-pity in your self-consciousness. Or take volition: If the Holy Spirit controls your life in the pipe that leads to volition, you will discover the working out of the will of God; and if not, then you will feed to your volition your own will and other things than the will of God.

You see, your volition without the aid of the Holy Spirit goes on negative signals and creates a vacuum and it becomes legalism, human viewpoint, and all other things that bring misery to the soul. If the Holy Spirit is in control of the pipe that flows to your emotional nature, then you grow in appreciation of God and God's will, but without proper doctrine going through your emotions, you can get off on tangents and get into weird things like speaking in tongues, and other silly meaningless things. Anyone who is in the tongues movement is on the Devil's side no matter how you slice it. It is easy to divert emotions into ecstasies. When the Holy Spirit pipe to the conscience gives Bible doctrine, then we develop norms and standards that are in keeping with the will of God, and you come to look at life from God's viewpoint. In other words, a conscience built on true doctrine becomes a God-monitor inside of you and gives you accurate guidance.

In this way you set up new norms and standards. In this way the old sin nature is frustrated for doctrine hits the old sin nature with confession and rebound, and you simply put a new power into play which is greater than the power of the old sin nature. So the only way to defeat the old sin nature is to feed the soul with the Word of God, and the old sin nature just can't cope with the power of God. Down with human good and up with divine good. Now all this is the meaning of "Filling our hearts with food". The word heart means the "mind". The mind is filled with Bible truth and you begin to grow properly and normally. Don't fall into that silly trap of talking about a head and heart belief. The only way you believe is in your mind. One of the strongest fortified parts of your body is your mind, and that is why God built a skull around it to protect it. If someone, who is a Christian, steps into sin someone will say, "Well, he had a head belief and not a heart belief". Nonsense! There is no such thing. Just one way to believe and that is in the mind. Don't ever talk about head and heart belief for when you do you advertise your stupidity.

"Filling our hearts" is a word used to mean to fill our minds up on the inside. The Greek word is "empiplemi". Food means Bible doctrine. It is more important than physical food. Keep the pipes open and let doctrine flow into all areas of your soul. This truth then can be translated into spiritual activity. Just remember, there will never be any end to learning Bible doctrine. (Illustration -To stop learning Bible doctrine is like a twelve-year-old boy eating a big meal and saying that this one big meal will do him for all the rest of his life. You can't do it in the physical realm and you can't do it in the spiritual realm.) Doctrine in the mind is converted into Christian activity and growth. Without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, you allow false doctrine to flow into the soul. This is why we have so many mixed up Christians running around over the earth.

ACTS 14:18 "And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them." Paul said much more than is recorded here. But with his very thoughtful message, he scarcely restrained them from doing them sacrifice.

ACTS 14:19 "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." These Judaizers have followed Paul and Barnabas from Antioch and Iconium. These are unsaved people, people who have rejected and resisted the grace of God. They went on negative signals and now they have caught up with the missionaries. They have mental attitude sins and are jealous of Paul. They are legalistic and they believe that man does the work and man gets the credit and God just stands by and receives the results. They have a vacuum in their soul and mental attitude sins and thus self-induced misery. Here are people who manufacture their own misery.

They hate Paul and are envious. They are following Paul and are trying to destroy what Paul has been doing. They not only reject Christ themselves but they don't want anyone else to believe in him. They persuaded the leaders to turn on Paul and all it took was some jealous unbelievers. We actually have a mob scene here and nothing good ever came from a mob. To cater to a mob is to actually aid in the hastening destruction of any country. A mob never does anything but to bring out the worst in a cause. So these Judaizers turn on Paul. One moment the people were ready to offer sacrifice to them, and the next moment they are ready to kill them. So they stoned Paul to death. Please notice what warped hypocrites they are. They stone him and then they say that this should have been done outside the city, so they drag him outside the city limits to make legal the illegal killing they have just committed. (These Jews have such a keen appreciation for the fine points of the law.)

Your King James Version says, "Supposing him to be dead" but the correct translation says, "Concluding that he was dead". In other words, they knew Paul was dead. But you see, Paul was in the hands of God and God is not yet ready for Paul to check out. To read about what happened turn to 2 Cor. 12:1-4 and read it.

2 COR. 12:1-4 "It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." From this Scripture we learn that when they stoned Paul he died and his soul went to the third heaven, and he had a meeting with Christ. In other words, while his followers were standing there crying over Paul, he was having a ball with the Lord up in glory. So Paul can't tell whether he was in the body or out of the body, but the Lord revealed things to him that it was impossible for him to put into words. But Paul knew the reality of these things. He heard unspeakable things when he lay dead in the streets of Lystra. His soul departed and went for a visit with the Lord, but then his soul returned and entered his body and he was resuscitated, and the next day he and Barnabas went on to Derbe.

I think the principle is this--No one can destroy you until the Lord is through with you. God had work for Paul to do, letters for him to write, churches for him to build, and God is not going to let those stones in Lystra deprive the world of the mighty work Paul is yet to do.