

Ready to Suffer

If you read through the gospels, you'll see that Jesus never promised people that if they followed him their lives would be easier. Rather, he told his disciples that their lives would get harder in many ways. He told them that people would treat them the way they treated him (some loved him; some hated him). Jesus actually called people to suffer as he suffered. Following Christ is a good life, but it's also a hard life at times. Today's passage illustrates how clearly Paul understood his calling to suffer for Christ. It also describes Paul's conviction that all disciples have that same calling . . . including us. We are called to suffer for Christ.

Read Acts 14:1-28

1. What do Paul and Barnabas' experience in Iconium (vv. 1-7)? What kind of opposition did they face?
2. In Lystra Paul heals a lame man who had faith to be made well (v. 9). What does the reaction of the crowd reveal about their spiritual worldview?
3. Luke records the first example of the early church preaching to a purely pagan audience (vv. 15-17). What do you notice about how Paul addresses them? What does he emphasize? Why does he utilize this approach?
4. What kind of opposition did Paul and his coworkers eventually experience in Lystra?
5. Paul was stoned to the extent that the people thought he was dead (v. 19). And yet how does he respond? What does this tell us about how he viewed suffering?

6. After Paul had been stoned and left for dead, Luke tells us that Paul and Barnabas retraced their steps and returned to the cities where people had come to Christ (vv. 21-23). How do we see them preparing these disciples, including preparing them for suffering?

Steve said:

My next question is, "Have we accepted our calling to suffer for Christ?" Do we think the way Paul thought about suffering for Christ? One challenge in even answering this question is the fact that in this country we don't presently face the type of persecution Paul did. . . So how do we evaluate whether or not we've accepted our calling to suffer for Christ? Here are a couple thoughts. First, notice how offend-able you are in general; notice how easily you are offended or agitated or angry in everyday life. Notice whether your instinct is to take revenge in thought, word, or deed. Notice whether you hold other people in contempt for the way they speak and act toward you. If we aren't long-suffering when it comes to these situations that are common to everyone, we probably haven't accepted our calling to suffer for Christ.

7. Would you say you have accepted your calling to suffer for Christ? Why or why not?
8. Using the metric of offend-ability, what insight does this give you?
9. Why do you think at times we are afraid to suffer for Jesus? What can help grow in our willingness to suffer?
10. What is your main application from this passage?