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KENNEDY'S 321 Market Street

BIG ADVENTURES OF MISSIONARIES

Paul and Barnabas Acclaimed as Gods From the Heavens, Then Stoned by Mob

The International Sunday School Lesson for May 21 is "The Cripple of Lystra."—Acts Ch. 14. (By William T. Ellis). If you can meet with triumph and disaster and treat those two imposters just the same, If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you, If all men count with you, but none too much, When one adventures greatly in life he learns to be superior to circumstances. Buffetings and bouquets both come to be part of the day's work of masterful men. The cup which life presses to the lips of the great holds alternate drafts of bitter and of sweet. They who attain the highest plane of spirit are as little perturbed by cries of "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" as by the rabble's shouts of "Hosanna! Hosanna!" Palm branches and scourges, garlands and stones, are equally unable to swerve from its purpose a triumphant life. It is the great story which is today's Sunday School Lesson, we find Paul and Barnabas acclaimed as gods come down from heavens and then they are by the same crowd mobbed and stoned and left for dead. The adventures of these first missionaries make our commonplace and conventional and

comfortable Christianity seem humdrum. A Railway and Some Refugees It took a riot to move Paul and Barnabas from Pisidian Antioch to their next preaching place, which was the ancient city of Iconium—a city that disputes with Damascus the claim to being the oldest in the world. The few Americans and Europeans who have traveled in Asia Minor know Iconium, or Konia as it is called today, as a central railway point, and as the place where is to be found the largest and best hotel in Turkey, outside of Constantinople. When I registered at this hotel, a few lines above my signature was that of Sir William Ramsey, the famous archaeologist and authority upon the life and travels of St. Paul, who makes Konia his headquarters when in Asia Minor. Here, too, is Dr. Dodd's noble American Hospital, which is just now vainly trying to save the lives of more than a score of thousands of Armenian refugees, who are encamped outside the city. To-day, as in the time of Paul, Konia is a place where men suffer for their faith in Christ. All of the marks of a successful mission attach to the apostle's work in Iconium. First of all they made converts, and then they made enemies. Paul would have thought that the devil was having everything his own way if his preaching had been viewed with indifference or complacency. If Paul and Barnabas had not made more of a commotion in a godless community than some modern churches, they would have spent the night in confession and contrition and prayer. When opposition arose they were not discouraged, but spoke freely and worked tirelessly, being given many signs and marvels to attest their ministry. Christianity became the issue above all other issues in the great heathen city of Iconium. The success of these missionaries from Antioch was so great that both Gentiles and Jews and the Roman politicians combined for an attack upon the Christian leaders. Hatred, like politics, makes

strange bedfellows. The Gentiles and the Jews ceased from opposition to each other to make common cause against Paul and Barnabas. The arguments they used were those of force, stoning the men out of the city. These doughty missionaries accepted their expulsion from the city of Iconium as a "call" to Lystra, where they continued to tell the Good News. Scared By Success The sort of preaching that does things always attracts attention. Among Paul's hearers one day was a man who had been a cripple from birth, a well-known town character, a beggar on one of the principal highways. Him Paul healed with a word. The restored cripple, leading and shouting, told his tale to the city. The crowd, always eager for some novelty, were caught by this wonder and they began to shout, "The gods have assumed human form and they have come down to us." Here was a sensation indeed—something to stimulate the faded interests of these city dwellers. Calling Barnabas "Zeus" or "Jupiter," and Paul "Hermes" or "Mercury," they swiftly organized a religious demonstration. The priest of Zeus, eager to get all the credit possible for his temple, brought bullocks and garlands to the gate to offer sacrifice to these men whom they acclaimed as gods. Not many can resist adulation. The extreme compliments are accepted by most of us as our due. It is difficult for a public speaker to think that the flattering words with which he is introduced do not represent the judicial appraisal of his real worth. But these old missionaries were of a different sort, and the demonstration intended for them set to tearing their clothes and showing an excitement that no ill treatment had ever aroused in them. Nobody ever heard Paul and Barnabas lamenting or walling when they were mobbed. But when they were being stoned, they cried, "Sirs, why are you doing all this? We also are but men, with nature kindred to your own; and we bring you the Good News that you are to

turn from these unreal things, to worship the everliving God, the Creator of earth and sky and sea and everything that is in them. In times gone by He allowed all the nations to go their own way; and yet by His beneficence He has not left His existence unattested—His beneficence, I mean, in sending rain from Heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and joyfulness. Even with words like these they had difficulty in preventing the thronging crowd from offering sacrifices to them." These men were in apostolic succession to John the Baptist, who said "He must increase but I must decrease." They were prophets from the same school, "Not unto us, O Jehovah, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory." This unprecedented ovation to themselves they used merely as an opportunity for preaching the living God, whose humble servants they were. It is a great man who can take praises for himself and turn them into a pulpit for the preaching of Christ, so that he himself is forgotten. Defied, Then Mobbed Every man who has observed life has remarked upon the fickleness of popular favor. The world seems to weave alternate crowns of laurel and crowns of thorns for its great. Hidden in obscurity and poverty in many parts of the land today are men and women whose names won applause and figured in the front pages of the newspapers. There is no form of success more unstable and unsatisfactory than the applause of the crowd. The appetite for it has ruined more men than have been inspired by it. The simple truth is that anybody who is strong enough to lead the multitude aright, thus winning its plaudits, is reasonably sure, if he remains strong, to incur the enmity of the multitudes by unpopular views. If a man has no better measure of success than the buzz of the crowd, then he is in a sorry way indeed. The heads of these missionaries were not turned by the attempt at aposthesis. They went right on

preaching the Gospel. Nor were they surprised when, in a short time, the same people who had tried to engage them stoned Paul and dragged him out of the town, believing him to be dead. That was an experience which the missionaries could stand better than they could the ovations of the fickle multitude. It is worth remembering that the disciples of Paul collected around him when he lay as dead. Those were courageous saints in the days when discipleship meant persecution. The early Christians knew how to die for their faith, and they knew how to live for it. Earnest Crosby's little poem is pertinent: "So he died for his faith. That is fine; More than most of us do. But stay, can you add to that line That he lived for it, too?" "It is easy to die. Men have died For a wish or a whim— From bravado or passion or pride— Was it harder for him?" "But to live; every day to live out All the truth that he dreamed. While his friends met his conduct with doubt, And the word with contempt— Was it thus that he plodded ahead, Never turning aside? Then we'll talk of the life that he led— Never mind how he died." Men Who Could Not Be Downed One day Paul lay outside the gate of Lystra, apparently a corpse, bruised, bleeding, soiled; the next day we find him on his way to Derbe and proclaiming the Good News there. His hard times were not counted a reason for running away from his work. Paul simply could not be discouraged. His only passion was for the preaching of the Gospel. He had no time to think of wounds or weariness. With him the work was the thing. There is nothing that interferes with the efficiency of a worker like beginning to

contemplate his own state of health or of mind. After a season of successful preaching at Derbe, what did these magnificent adventures do but retrace their steps to the very place where they had been mobbed, Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. There is courage for you, "A burnt child dreads the fire," but Paul never feared the place of hardship. "I count him great, Who, by a life heroic, conquers fate." That is a thrilling picture in the gallery of Scripture which depicts Paul and Barnabas retracing their steps openly through the cities where they had narrowly escaped death. Making Fast the Work At the siege of Ludsmith a man was courtmartialled for being a discourager. Paul in this hard experience returned in order to strengthen the disciples by encouraging them to hold fast to the faith. One might think it was he that needed the encouragement. He laid down the principle "It is through many afflictions that we must make our way into the kingdom of God." In every church in these centers of persecution Paul and Barnabas held meetings at which elders were elected, and established the Church so that the work would go on whether the apostles were present or absent. Wise with the wisdom of Holy Writ is that worker who establishes his work so that it will continue whether he lives or dies, succeeds or fails.

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