

You Can't Fly to Heaven in a Straight Line

(Acts 14:8-20)

I. Introduction

A. Max Lucado (*The Eye of the Storm*) tells the story of Chippie the Parakeet

1. Chippie's owner was vacuuming the phone rang— Chippie was sucked in.
 - a. She opened the bag, and Chippie was coated in dust, so under the facet!
 - b. She then notice that Chippie was shivering, so out came the blow dryer
2. Little Chippie never knew what hit him—sucked in, washed up, blown away
3. Owner later said, "*Chippie doesn't sing any more—he just sits and stares.*"

B. Life is just like that sometimes—sucked in, washed up and blown away

1. Comedian Jerry Seinfeld compares life to a roller-coaster ride:

We're all strapped in, and no one can stop it. As you make each passage from youth to adulthood to maturity, sometimes you put your arms up and scream, sometimes you just hang on to that bar in front of you. But the ride is the thing. I think the most you can hope for at the end of life is that your hair's messed up, you're out of breath, and you didn't throw up."

- a. Sometimes it gets pretty hard to hold onto the bar—just ask Chippie!
- b. Sometimes life leaves us with more than just ruffled feathers
2. Some of you have been going through some of those difficult times.
 - a. Some struggle with loss of jobs, health concerns, relationship issues, etc.
 - b. Life reminds us that it is never a bowl of cherries; sometimes it's the pits!
3. Or maybe you are like Jeff Garrison who grew up down the street from me
 - a. One day we're walking to the bus stop, and Jeff just suddenly stops.
 - b. I asked what was wrong; he said, "*I have a feeling of impending doom!*"
 - c. Sometimes things go well— suspicious something's about to happen!

C. In our reading ([Acts 14](#)), Paul and Barnabas are on 1st world mission trip.

1. This wasn't just their first tour; it was the first tour (*manual not written yet*)
 - a. They just left Iconium, which Luke sums up with non sequitur ([14:2-3](#))
 - b. They were opposed by unbelievers, so they stayed there a long time.
 - c. That was good, because it prepared them for their next work in Lystra.
2. Lystra was a Roman colony, built by Octavian as power base in Galatia
 - a. Many Latin inscriptions have been found → large Roman populace
 - b. It was Timothy's hometown and city that Paul would never forget!

II. Paul and Barnabas in Lystra (Acts 14:9-20)

- A. The first thing that Paul does in Lystra is heal a lame man ([Acts 14:8-10](#))
1. His condition is stressed “*crippled in his feet...lame from birth...never walked*”
 2. Miracles both established the miracle worker and drew a crowd to teach.
 - a. In [Acts 3](#), Peter healed a lame man and preached to crowd that gathered.
 - b. The response of this pagan crowd was not what Paul expected ([14:11-13](#))
 3. In *Metamorphoses*, Ovid has Zeus and Hermes masquerade as humans.
 - a. They traveled through the land to see if any would offer hospitality.
 - 1) No one did except Philemon and Baucis, old couple living in a hut.
 - 2) Gods put them on a mountain and flooded the inhospitable valley
 - 3) They transformed the old hut to temple, making old couple priests.
 - b. Tegen where Ovid locates the story was Phrygia— chief city was Lystra.
 - 1) Temple mentioned in [v. 13](#) supposedly came from hut in the legend!
 - 2) It makes sense that the people of Lystra see Paul & Barnabas as gods
- B. Think about how this scene contrasted with Iconium for Paul and Barnabas.
1. In Iconium they were opposed and attacked; here they were hailed as gods!
 - a. Part of them must have basked just a bit in the glow of this attention!
 - 1) Tiresome always being contradicted & having to defend every word.
 - 2) Surely it’s better to be a god and have people hang on every word!
 - b. It didn’t work out too well when Herod accepted worship ([12:22-23](#)).
 - c. Moral of the story—if you aren’t God, don’t accept worship as a god!
 2. Paul and Barnabas do refuse worship, they want to preach Jesus ([14:15-17](#))
 - a. Message was simplified for pagans; announce the gospel, don’t preach it!
 - b. We might call this a “*pre-gospel message*” that pointed to one true God.
 - c. And they pointed away from false gods—like idols and like themselves!
 3. As the old saying warns us, “*No good deed goes unpunished*” ([Acts 14:19](#))
 - a. Paul goes from *throned to stoned*, from being *attested to being molested*
 - 1) Paul must have felt like Chippie – sucked in, washed up, blown away
 - 2) Or maybe like Jesus going from cries of “*hosanna*” to “*crucify him!*”
 - b. Amazing part— how understated Luke is in the conclusion ([Acts 14:20](#))

III. You Can't Fly to heaven in a Straight Line

A. Years ago, Marvin Phillips wrote *You Can't Fly to Heaven in a Straight Line*

1. You know what was point of the book? *Me either... I just remember title!*
 - a. But title sums up the *year* Paul and Barnabas spent in Lystra *one day!*
 - b. They went from mountaintop to valley, praise to persecution in one day!
 - 1) One minute, Paul is talking a throng of adoring people worshipping
 - 2) The next, they are chunking rocks at him until they think he is dead.
2. Paul's service as missionary in Lystra certainly wasn't in a straight line!
 - a. But then, none of Paul's life was a lived in a straight line! (**2 Cor 4:7-9**)
 - b. He was bound for the Promised Land— *it's complicated getting there!*

B. But we know something of that, don't we? That is the story of our life too.

1. Sometimes, the world seems to change around us in blink of an eye
 - a. One minute, we work hard to support our family; next we're out of work.
 - b. One minute, we're healthy as horse; next, doctors are prodding/poking!
 - c. One minute, we're good friends with someone; the next, they turn on us
2. Other times, it is our own character that seems to change and let us down.
 - a. One minute, we are loving and helpful; the next we speak in anger/gossip
 - b. One minute we are thanking God for His blessing of family and friends.
 - c. The next we are so focused on ourselves that we seem to ignore both!
3. Roadblocks on the road to heaven come from these two different sources—
 - a. The first is a world that sometimes simply seems to turn against us.
 - b. The other is ourselves; sometimes we meet the enemy and it is us!
4. The source of both is Satan; the reason for both is to distract us from God!

C. We should never be surprised by any of these difficulties—internal or external

1. What we must do is keep our eye of faith fixed on Christ
 - a. What is Paul's answer to constantly being crushed and perplexed by life.
 - b. He tells us that we need to remember what is really real (**2 Cor 4:16-18**)
2. Some of you are in danger of being distracted by outward wasting away
 - a. Hardships, struggles and personal failures can certainly be distracting.
 - b. But there is a reality that is more real—God constantly works on/in is

IV. Conclusion: How Do We Handle Struggle?

A. **First**, we must focus on God and what we believe about Him ([Acts 14:17](#))

He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.”

1. Paul pointed these pagans to the one true God who is Giver of good things.
2. That wasn't just a Sunday School lesson for others—it was fact for Paul.
 - a. Even during the difficult times of difficulty, God was still Giver of good.
 - b. OK, that is harder for us to see while they are throwing rocks at us!
 - c. But it is just as true during the hard times—we need to remember that!

B. **Second**, we must surround ourselves with people of faith ([Acts 14:20](#))

But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back to the city

1. I don't believe it was accidental that Paul here is surrounded by disciples.
 - a. When we go through times of crisis, we need people of faith around us.
 - b. That is true even when the crisis is created by our own hand!
2. The church is God's support group to help us on the way to heaven
3. If you don't go to heaven in a straight line, then you really need a rest stop.

C. **Third**, we need to do what is right despite how we may feel ([Acts 14:21](#))

They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra

1. Paul did not really dwell so much on the difficulty that he faced at Lystra
2. He simply hurried on to the next task that needed to be done.
 - a. We harm ourselves by not dealing with spiritual post-traumatic stress.
 - b. We harm ourselves by so focusing on our struggle that we stop serving

D. **Fourth**, we need to use our experiences to strengthen strugglers ([Acts 14:22](#))

²²*strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said.*

1. To what is Paul referring by “*many hardships to enter the kingdom of God?*”
 - a. In the next verse, they appoint elders; is that why he mentions suffering?
 - b. He uses what he suffered at Lystra as an encouragement to the disciples.
2. His experience of struggle became talking points to help the lives of others.
3. God can use our struggles as a way to help others as well.

E. Can't fly to heaven in a straight line— valleys as updraft that move us closer!