

Get On Up!

On Sunday, we closed our sermon series on “the genius of the earliest Christians” with a grand finale story that captures the essence of all we’ve been talking about for the past 8 weeks.

1. Warm up question: What are your plans for Thanksgiving?
2. Read Acts 14:1-18. Paul had experienced an incredible turn around in life, going from chief persecutor of Christians to their chief advocate. The success he had in his work in Lystra is what we would expect – the way it’s “supposed to be.” Paul got his life right with God, so now God was blessing him. In Lystra, Paul and Barnabas were becoming rock stars. These were “the best of times.”
 - a. When Paul healed the lame man and the people of Lystra responded by hailing him and Barnabas as gods, what do you think Paul and Barnabas were feeling and thinking?
 - b. What has been the best time in your life so far – the time when you were riding highest? If you could choose to always live life there in that high spot, would you?
3. Life tends to follow a familiar pattern: “We live, we die.” When people come to God, they often seem to assume that God will exempt them from the hard knocks of life. The assumed new pattern is: “We live, we find God, then it just keeps getting better and better forever after.”
 - a. Many preachers and teachers present Christianity that way, as a cure for all life’s ills. Why do you think that kind of preaching is so popular?
 - b. Have you ever found yourself caught in that kind of thinking? Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you thought, “Why are you letting this happen to me, God? This isn’t how it’s supposed to be!” What was going on at the time?
 - c. Do you think God blesses believers more than others? Why or why not?
4. Life has a way of turning on a dime. That’s what Paul experienced in our Bible story. In one moment, the people of Lystra were hailing him as a god. **But then!** Acts 14:19 says, “But Jews came [to Lystra] from Antioch and Iconium and won over the crowds. Then they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.”
 - a. When Paul realized that the crowds had turned on him and were ready to stone him to death, what do you suppose he was thinking and feeling?
 - b. Paul’s stoning is ironic. Remember, in Acts 7 he was instrumental in orchestrating the stoning of a Christian preacher named Stephen. How might

Paul's history as a persecutor of the church have affected how he processed his own stoning experience?

- c. For Paul, the situation went from great-to-awful at lightning speed. We often experience the same thing. Jeff told how his family's wonderful beach vacation was suddenly interrupted by his father's stroke. When in your life have you experienced a sudden reversal of fortune? At the time, how did the sudden reversal affect your feelings toward God?
 - d. Have you ever known someone who lost faith when life turned bad? Tell us about it.
5. After Paul is dragged outside the city and left for dead, Acts 14:20 matter-of-factly says, "But when the disciples surrounded him, he got up and went into the city. The next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe." In this, we catch a glimpse of a more gritty and realistic formula for Christian living: "**We live, we die, we always rise again – just like Jesus.**" In this formula, death and defeat are inevitable, but there is always good life – and often better life – on the other side.
- a. How does that way of seeing things sit with you? Do you believe it's true? Do you believe it's empowering? Why or why not?
 - b. Jeff said, "When facing defeat, powerful people don't ask, 'Will I rise again?' Instead, they ask, 'How will I rise again?'" What's the difference in the two questions, and do you believe the difference is critical to our level of power in life?
 - c. Read the following verses and discuss what Jesus wanted us to learn from each: John 2:13-22, John 12:20-26, and John 16:31-33.
 - d. What should we learn from I Peter 5:6-11 about how we should approach hard times and suffering?
 - e. Looking back across your life, when have you experienced a death or defeat, only to emerge stronger or better on the other side?
 - f. Where in your life right now are you facing possible death or defeat? Tell us what's happening and what it might look like for you to move through that situation with the expectation of resurrection on the other side? Are you ready to tackle that situation with resurrection expectation?