

Good morning! Have you ever been persecuted for your faith? Most American Christians have not. In fact, most American Christians have never really suffered very much for anything. When we think of persecution we might think that our particular point of view is not espoused by the media, or that the zoning laws don't favor the location in which we want to build our new multimillion dollar sanctuary. Maybe we think we are suffering when we don't make (or haven't saved) quite enough money to be able to buy a new car. This is not the same for Christians around the world. There are many Christians in the world today who are being persecuted for their faith. Before we talk about that though, let's read today's passage together:

But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe. After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

### **Acts 14:19-22**

Have you ever discovered that you learn more when things go wrong than when things go right? In today's passage, Paul and his team were doing mission work. They were having some success---the Bible tells us that they had "won over the crowds". Would you like to win over some crowds when you shared the Gospel? Maybe---but maybe not. After they had such good preaching success, we read that the crowd stoned Paul, dragged him out of the city, and left him for dead. What happened then? He got up and went back into the city! Paul's mission was not determined by what other people did to him; he followed his calling. He and Barnabas continued going from place to place, preaching the Gospel and making disciples, strengthening them and encouraging them. His message to these disciples had deepened, though. It wasn't just, "Jesus saves," or "Jesus answers your prayers." Paul encouraged these believers to continue in the faith. Why did he do that? Because they were experiencing things that made them not want to continue in the faith. Now his message was also, "*Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.*" Paul understood and taught that after we come to Christ we still have some entering to do. It was important to him that they know that the doorway into the Kingdom can be tribulation. When you and I came to Christ we discovered that God is good. As we continue with Him we discover that we know Him more deeply when knowing Him costs us something. It deepens our worship and expands the dimensions of our faith. Let me ask you this morning: Has following Jesus ever cost you anything?