

Acts 14:1-28

“Mission Accomplished”

Ch 14 brings us to the close of the 1st official “missions” trip ever *coordinated*, *consolidated*, and sent out from the church. We’ve seen things get shaky, but *overall* things have been successful as the Kingdom of God has been multiplied, the Son of God has been glorified, people are being saved, and disciples are being made. Ch 14 will be no exception to any of the above, they’ll ultimately make it back to Antioch with an exciting report of what the Lord has done, but not without much adversity, shaky situations, and turbulent times. You recall what Jesus said, *“Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.”* John 15:20 and with Jesus they did both, some kept His Word, but He also suffered persecution, and now Paul and Barnabas are experiencing both as well. Many are responding positively to the message of the cross of Jesus Christ, being saved and keeping the Word that’s delivered to them. Others are responding negatively, getting irate, they’re irritated, agitated by the message, they’re stirring people up and persecuting them.

Now did God grant them a great opportunity and an open door? Yes, did that then make for easy sailing from word go? No, the point being that you’re not to be deceived, your life of serving Jesus Christ isn’t always going to be smooth sailing as you go from one glorious/victorious experience or adventure to the other. Sometimes times will be tough, situations will get shaky, you’ll be confronted with adversity, perhaps hostility, but don’t let that discourage you. I’m glad that the 1st time they met with opposition they didn’t go, “Well, that’s it apparently we’re up against a closed door lets go home.” They persevered and God used their lives, don’t get going when the going gets tough, if the Lord has led you in a certain direction, just hang in there, persevere, and God will use your life.

We catch up to Paul and Barnabas in Iconium, having just left Antioch in Pisidia, you recall they were experiencing radical success in that one week they preached the message of salvation by grace through Jesus Christ in the synagogue, the next week nearly the whole city turned out to hear the message. Vs 45 tells us that that provoked envy/jealousy within the Jews and so they began to contradict and oppose the things spoken by Paul. So Paul said, “Fine, we sought to bring the message to you 1st but since you reject the message thereby judging yourselves unworthy of everlasting life we’re turning to the Gentiles. Now when the Gentiles heard that they were topped out, they were open *to* the message, being brought to Christ *through* the message (notice vs 50-51 of ch 13). What did this shaking the dust off their feet mean? Perhaps you remember when Jesus was speaking to His disciples about going into a certain home, or city to minister. and He said, *“And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet.”* Matt 10:14 and He spoke of how it would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that city. and The idea there was that they were leaving them to their own demise and that they wanted to take no part of what they were about down the road with them, not even the dust that had clung to their feet, so they would shake it off and move on.

How does that apply to you and me? Like this, you are going to have people who will assail you or assault you verbally, persecute you emotionally, just try to get under your skin incessantly, and you have one of 2 choices in that moment. You can either shake it *off* and move on, or get shaken *up* and quit. Paul and Barnabas opted for the former, when the persecution came, they just shook it off, and moved on and now we find them in Iconium.

Vs1

Few things here # We notice the familiar pattern in their approach toward a given city in that they went 1st to the synagogue. If there were even as many as 10 adult Jewish males in a given city they'd establish a synagogue and so as was their pattern they went their 1st, they wanted to let the people of Israel know that the Messiah that they've long awaited, that they've read of week after week in the law and the prophets has come. and Generally speaking a converted Jew would make for sort of an accelerated Christian as it pertained to their growth because they were so richly steeped in scripture already, and that would serve as a catalyst of sorts to spur on their growth as it all fell into focus in how it all pertained to Jesus. So they went to the synagogue to share the message of Jesus Christ

But 2^{ndly}, and something else that we point out from time to time, but it's worth repeating and that is that they went *together*. When the Lord sent out His disciples He sent them in pairs, the bible says that with the Lord 1 could put a thousand to flight, and 2, 10,000. The point being that there is strength in #'s, but what I want you to see here is that there are no lone rangers in the ministry. Paul went with Barnabas, later he'll go with Silas, it's just not wise (generally speaking) to endeavor all alone into a given ministry, with no accountability, or someone who's there to back up your integrity, or whatever. I don't think you'll find where Paul did too much ministry alone; when Peter went to Cornelius he took 6 guys with him. Now regarding your inward personal relationship with Jesus, that's something you have to do for yourself, no one can do it for you, but when it comes to outward activity, it's good to work together with other people. Jesus said that if even 2 are gathered in His name that He'll be there with them, we know that where 2 or more agree on any given thing (relating to God's will) that it'll be done. So your witness is stronger when you're with another, your prayers can be stronger when you're with another, its just wisdom to work with others of like heart and like minds in the ministry than to try and go it alone, go it alone and often times you're just inviting trouble into your life, stay accountable and things will go much better.

But the 3rd thing I wanted you to see in this vs is that little adverb about 1/2 way into it "so." It says that they "so" spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and the Greeks believed. So that there is some validity to the fact that it's not only *what* I say that matters when I'm witnessing, or sharing the gospel, or whatever, but *how* I say it is important to. Now lest I be misunderstood let me clarify that what I'm *not* talking about is that you need to be a smooth articulator or an eloquent enunciator if you're to be effective in your giving out of the gospel. But there is wisdom in thinking before we speak, and being tactful in our approach.

The bible teaches us that we're to #1 study how to answer, and #2 be quick to listen, and slow to speak. In other words do your best to take in all the facts before you respond, and when it's *time* to respond, think carefully before you do regarding the words that you choose. Do you think that a great multitude would've believed if the 1st words from Paul's mouth towards these guys was, "Is it possible that you guys could be any more wrong in your approach to God than you are right now?" and He just began to criticize their approach to God, called them idiots with their understanding of the scripture, began to cut down their local rabbis for not leading them in a way that accorded more with what the scriptures intended? I doubt that his evangelistic approach would've been too successful in that regard. But instead he came to the cordially, he spoke persuasively, passionately, powerfully and penetratingly from the scripture, he spoke reasonably, kindly, and honestly, open heartedly so that people could discern his genuine concern and the people began to respond in droves. Now it's the gospel that has the power to save, not the fact that we're such great orators.

But if my presentation of the gospel is wrapped in criticism, or embedded in a belittling tone, than people won't even hear the gospel because I'll have tuned them out before I ever get to the point. So be mindful when you're speaking to people not only of what it is you have to say, but how it is that you're saying it to them. There's ways that we can speak that will disarm people, cause them to lower their guard, not because we're crafty that way, but because they can sense your genuine nature and legitimate concern. But then conversely there's ways to ensure that people never let their guard down because we just have a point to prove, or stand on a pedestal a few feet above them in our own minds, you might understand it like this, just be sensitive to the situation. Paul and Barnabas were experiencing phenomenal response to the gospel.

Vs2-3

When we read of "unbelieving Jews" it's not speaking of "non-religious" Jews, but rather those who've rejected Jesus Christ as Messiah. and These guys grabbed hold the Gentiles and began to back bite and divide them against Paul and Barnabas, probably much like in Antioch where they sought to contradict them, began to gossip about them, and started rumors concerning them. Where we read of "poisoning their minds" literally that means that they "embittered their souls" against the brethren, they were just talking trash about them. Trying to rob them of their integrity, or legitimacy, because if you can cause the teacher's character to come into question, than you can virtually undermine anything that he has to say, because if you can't trust the man, than how can you trust what the man has to say?

So they began to attack them personally, and were seeking to take the trust of the people from them specifically. So they stayed there a long time, now as to why they stayed there a long time I'll let you decide. Was it A). Because there was a great multitude of both Jews and Greeks who believed? Or B). Because the unbelieving Jews were seeking to poison the minds of those who otherwise would come to believe?

Truth be known it was probably a bit of both, they were experiencing tremendous response to the gospel so they stuck it out, but then also they didn't want all their labor to be undermined by these guys who were trying to undo what they did so they stuck around to secure the work. Not only that they no doubt realized that in such a state of opposition, the disciples would need to be well grounded to endure, so they stayed to help root the believers. and God was bearing witness to the truth of the gospel (that is the word of His grace) by granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

You might underline the phrase "the word of His grace" because that's what the message of the gospel (Jesus Christ and Him crucified) is; it's the word of His grace. It's by grace that you have been saved, it's by grace that you're able to stand; it's grace that sustains you, that strengthens you, that sanctifies you, that justifies you. Thank God that there's more grace in Him than there is sin in me. That where sin abounds grace abounds still more, there is no sin that you can commit that goes beyond the reaches of the depths of God's grace and willingness to forgive except for one, and that is the rejection of Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. To die with out Christ in your heart and in your life is to die in sin apart from grace and be eternally separated from God. But God desires to be gracious unto you, and God was backing them up and bearing witness to the Word of His grace by signs and wonders being done through their hands.

Vs4

That's always going to be the way that it is, when God is doing a work there'll be those who are for it, and those who are against it, those who side *for* you, and those who side *against* you. The gospel of Jesus Christ by its very nature creates division because it doesn't allow for neutral ground; you're either for Christ or against Him. and Sometimes the division that hits closest is that which takes place in our own homes, but it can happen.

Jesus said, *"Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."* The gospel can divide the best of friends, spouses, parents from children, brothers and sisters or any # of combinations, so don't feel like you're all alone if you're experiencing a little of that (or perhaps a lot of it) Jesus said it would happen. and He promised to reward the life of the one who suffered loss because of Him. He said, *"Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time -- houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions -- and in the age to come, eternal life."* Mark 10:29-30 So take heart if you're experiencing division in your life because of Christ, its nothing new.

Vs5-7

So these guys were looking to rush headlong into martyrdom, they stayed there despite opposition but they kept an eye on the situation and when the levels of contention raised to critical state, they left. and When they got to a new city, it was the same message, different city. The message is always the same no matter how old the people may be, how young they may be, what ethnicity, or culture their background may be rooted in, the cross is “cross cultural” its “cross generational” the cross spans every gap that otherwise separates mankind because it appeals to the need of the human heart. So that if you’re apart of humanity period, the message of the cross is relevant to you, because all have sinned, all fall short of the glory of God, all have need of forgiveness and that forgiveness comes through the grace of God by the cross of Jesus Christ So no matter where you may be, who you may be speaking to, the message is the same; Jesus Christ and Him crucified. and That’s the focus, we read a minute ago how that God was doing miraculous things through these guys, but that wasn’t their focus, they weren’t roving miracle workers, they were preachers, or proclaimers of the gospel. There are crusades today that focus on healing, or various miracles, signs and wonders, you won’t find that in the bible, Jesus never went on a “Signs and wonders” tour, neither did the apostles, their focus was simply upon sharing the message of Jesus Christ and then out of that God would at times confirm the word by the miraculous. But the miraculous was never at the forefront.

Vs8-10

Notice we don’t read of Paul going into the synagogue in Lystra, apparently there wasn’t one there and so he’s basically doing the “open air” thing, just witnessing on the street. I don’t know perhaps he’s sharing what Jesus has done on the cross, how that God raised Him from the dead, how that He can forgive them of their sins and change their lives, make them brand new and all. But whatever he’s sharing this cripple is tuned in, and as Paul looks at him he can tell that this guy really believes that Jesus can touch *his* life, and make *him* whole. The Spirit just gives him this discernment, and so Paul just looks at him and says, “Stand up straight on your feet!” and The guy jumps up and begins to leap and walk around.

Now we should point something out here, in *this* case God responded to his faith personally. Now is God obligated to heal us because of our faith? No, God owes us nothing, but often times God will respond to our faith in honor *of* our faith because with out faith its impossible to please Him which means that conversely faith *is* pleasing to God. The bible says, “...without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” Heb 11:6 But in this case God responded to *his* faith, when Peter raised up a man who’d been lame, that guy never saw it coming, God was in that case responding to Peter’s faith. (Acts 3)

There are those who will say that any time you don't receive a healing from God it's simply a sign of your lack of faith. But the bible makes it clear that at times God's healing upon your life has nothing to do with your faith. Sometimes it's God's honoring of the faith of another, at times God may respond to your faith, at times it may not be God's will to grant us physical healing in that He has another plan for our lives that for whatever reason doesn't involve a miraculous physical healing. Paul himself had a physical ailment, when he wrote to Timothy he said that he left a guy named Trophimus in Miletus sick, I'm sure he prayed for him. So let's not box God in or think that we have the formula and that if we rub His magic lamp with the hand of our faith that He's somehow obligated to heal us. At times He will, at times He won't depending upon how it serves His sovereign purposes. But in *this* case, God honored this man's faith and when Paul spoke to him a word of faith and said, "Stand up straight" he responded positively and did just that. A lot of people don't do that, they're given the word of faith every week, they're told that Jesus can forgive their sin, make them whole and change their lives, give them everlasting life, but they never respond positively to the message, never allow Jesus to touch *their lives* personally. This guy heard what was said, and responded in the affirmative.

Vs11-18

Notice a few quick things here; this miracle didn't produce saving faith in anyone. It got a lot of attention, but in a way it was unwanted attention, it had the opposite affect that they were hoping for. It's not the miraculous that produces saving faith, it's the word of God. (Turn quickly to Luke 16, 19-31)

Jesus says, if the Word of God isn't enough, even the miraculous won't do it. Think of how many miracles the Jews seen in the wilderness wanderings, yet why didn't they enter in to the Promised Land? Unbelief, the miraculous may entertain me and even amaze me emotionally, but it won't produce faith in me personally. The net affect of the miraculous work that came through Paul here was that these guys misinterpreted what happened to make them out to be gods. and No doubt because they were crying out in their own native tongue Paul and Barnabas didn't understand what was going on until they saw the oxen coming down the street being led by the priest from the temple of Zeus.

Then notice in vs 14 Paul and Barnabas started freaking out, saying, "Hey don't do this, we're men just like you." Which by the way encourages me, because we have a tendency to place the apostles and prophets, the men of the scripture on an unattainable level, but here's the news flash, they were men of like nature, just like me, and just like you. But God used these ordinary men in extraordinary ways, and He wants to do the same thing with you.

But he says, “Look, this is exactly what we’re here to try and turn you *away from*, these useless kinds of things *to* the Living God. Who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything that’s in them.” Notice that since he’s not speaking to men of the scripture, that he doesn’t try to use scripture to persuade them, that’s not where they’re at. Paul gets on their level, speaks of nature, things they can identify with and from that platform he takes them to the One who created all things, begins to speak to them of His goodness, how even though man walked *away* from Him, He still did good *for* them in that He gave rain to the earth, fruitful seasons and all. and He’s speaking of the common grace of God that’s seen even in creation that should point people to the Creator. He’s saying, “Don’t think that all this happens by chance, this is the result of God’s goodness to you, now turn *to* Him *from* these useless practices.” But even still they could barely keep the people from sacrificing to them.

Vs19-20

So these guys from Antioch and Iconium are some dedicated antagonist, traveling all this way just to disrupt the work of God. But this just demonstrates the fickle nature of humanity, Paul went from being the hero one day to being a zero the next. From “Hosanna blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,” to “Crucify Him” in a matter of a week. I heard someone say that the 1st day they idolize you, the 2nd day they criticize you, and the 3rd day they ostracize you. That’s why you have to do what you do in order to be pleasing to God, not to please man, because man will turn on you quick. Here they were ready to sacrifice to Paul as a god, next thing you know they’re stoning him, dragging him outside the city, and leaving him for dead. Did Paul actually die here? I don’t know, but it’s very possible, you can read 2nd Cor 12 where Paul speaks of a time (in the 3rd person) where he was caught up into the 3rd heaven. He says, “If I was in the body I didn’t know it, and if I were out of the body I didn’t miss it.” and He speaks of the fact that what he saw and heard was so phenomenal that it would be a crime to try to use words to describe it because no words would do it justice. But right after that he mentions the thorn in the flesh that he had to deal with because of the abundance of the revelations that he’d been given. and There are those who think that the thorn had something to do with perhaps some permanent damage that he was afflicted with due to being stoned here.

But the disciples are all standing around him, probably checking for a pulse, perhaps praying, just stunned, I don’t know. But he’s down, they gather around, and he stands back up. I like that, sometimes we can feel pretty beat down, but by having bros and sisters gather around and be there for us, it has a way of lifting us back up. Paul gets us, I’m sure that if they weren’t stunned yet, they were then, and then he goes back into the city. Now Timothy was from this city, and many think that seeing all this was what impacted him and drew him to Christ, I don’t know but I’m sure it had a profound affect on the young guy. But then the next day they take off for Derbe.

Vs21-22

No doubt a passionate message from personal experience. But notice the shepherd's heart in Paul, this is a man who loved the body of Christ. He heads right back into all these cities of persecution, that he might strengthen the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith. You know what, its no easy thing to lead a godly life, week, after month, after year, times can get tough. It takes a strong soul, and encouraged faith. Don't think things are going wrong in your life because the road is hard, be encouraged, narrow is the road and difficult is the way that leads to life and few find it. Rejoice that you're on that road and don't grow weary in doing well. For in due season you'll reap if you don't lose heart.

Vs23-28

I like the phrase in vs 26, "The work which they had completed." "Mission Accomplished." They finished well, what is the work that God has committed to your trust, don't throw in the towel, complete the work. Aren't you glad that Jesus *finished* the work of redemption on our behalf. Man I am, don't grow weary, finish well. Will it be easy, probably not, will God be faithful, absolutely, fulfill your ministry.

Maybe you don't know what God would have you to do because you've never surrendered your life to Him. That's where you can begin today, just by giving your life to Christ. It's not an easy path, not the end of all your problems, its forgiveness of your sin and everlasting life. Jesus laid down His life on the cross for you, and if you're willing to receive His sacrifice on your behalf than do that now, just open your heart and say Jesus, here's my life, here's my heart, I give it to you, make my heart your home.

Prayer points: That we would be faithful stewards with the work that You've committed to our trust. That we would persevere knowing that we must enter Your kingdom through many tribulations, help us to reach out to people on their level and lead them from there to You, teach us to do that, thank You that you use ordinary people in extra ordinary ways, we're open to You in that, use our lives, and help us to be sensitive to a given situation speaking in such a way so as to draw people to You.