

ON MISSION: The Consequences and the Conquests
Acts 14

(Read Acts 14)

Intro: Paul and Barnabas are continuing their missionary journey. As I've mentioned many times, the Bible, in its original form, had no punctuation, chapter delineations, or verses. Dr. Luke's account that he gives us in the Book of Acts, as the title of this series, THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH, suggests, is very literally a running account that presents the story of early church.

Last week, as we looked at Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas were on the island of Cyprus and from there they traveled across to the mainland of Asia Minor which is present day Turkey. That is where we pick up today in chapter 14 with several examples of what missionaries experience – that is, a lot of victories and even more frustrations. Trying to be creative, I have entitled this message, THE CONSEQUENCES AND THE CONQUESTS and we see that Paul and Barnabas experienced both. I have experienced mission work as others of you in this room have and I'm pretty certain we are not so naïve as to think it is a bed of roses. There is much misunderstanding, frustration, and not a little strife.

The Brethren and Christ embarked on their mission journey in 1898 when they sent their first missionaries to Southern Africa. Soon after that missionaries were also sent to India. In both cases, when missionaries set out for a foreign land their worldly goods were often packed in a coffin because they never expected to come home. When they said goodbye to their loved ones, they knew it was very possibly the last time that they would see them – and those they left behind knew it full well too.

One BIC family from Iowa sent out four of their children into the BIC mission field in Africa and in India. One daughter and her husband went to India and died of smallpox within a very short time of their arrival there. Her sister and her sister's husband went to Southern Africa and they also died, again of smallpox. In the late 1920s, another of our missionaries attempted to hunt down and kill a marauding lion. Instead the lion killed him. All these are examples of adversity that came from natural situations. Other missionaries lost their lives because their target audience was threatened by their message and they ended up giving their lives for the Gospel. Just recently, as I talked about the first martyr, Stephen, I used the example of the five young missionary men who died in Ecuador in 1956 attempting to share the gospel with the Warani tribe deep in the Amazon jungle. One of those five, Nate Saint, the pilot of the plane that flew the party into the jungle, had a sister named Rachel, who returned as a missionary to that very same tribe and spent the rest of her life, almost 35 years, as a missionary to them. I'm presently reading a book about the Warani and I find it interesting that Rachel Saint is not remembered in a complimentary way. They felt that she was the one who sold them out to the oil companies who came in and took over large swaths of their jungle. So, for missionaries, adversity is a real thing.

But . . .

There were victories

- Of course there are! The Brethren in Christ Church in Southern Africa is considerably larger in number than the Brethren in Christ Church anywhere else in the world. The gospel has made huge inroads there. This was the experience of Paul and Barnabas here in our text today. In some ways it's a travelogue of their experiences but there's something to be learned here. Right from the start we read, *Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed.* Acts 14:1 (ESV).
- There it is again! As we have seen all along in this study, many people came to faith in Christ as a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. As was common courtesy, when the apostles first arrived in Iconium they went to the synagogue. It was customary for Jewish synagogue leaders to offer the opportunity for their guests to bring greetings and Paul and Barnabas never missed the opportunity to preach the gospel. As a result, as we've seen over and over, many people became Christ Followers.
- That is the main victory that we read about here in this chapter. The rest are the consequences. As I pointed out . . .

Aversity will happen

- Being a Christ Follower is not a picnic. Everything's not hunky and dory when you pledge your life and future to Jesus. Going door-to-door sharing Jesus will get many doors slammed in your face. Preaching on a street corner may get eggs or tomatoes thrown in your direction. Jay Smith, who has spent his entire missionary career as a BIC missionary to Muslims, would go to Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park in London carrying a step ladder. He would find a good crowd and then he would climb up the step ladder and present the Gospel of Jesus Christ to, very often, hostile crowds of Muslims. There were many times that they tried to forcibly remove him from the ladder.
- Sharing Jesus is not easy. F. F. Bruce writes this, "*It is almost taken for granted throughout the New Testament that tribulation is the normal lot of Christians in this age: it is those who suffer for and with Christ now who will share his glory.*" And then he ends with this poignant thought "*No cross, no crown.*" This was certainly the case for Paul, listen, *But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.* Acts 14:2.
- Now notice the response by the apostles: did they run away? No. Did they whine about their situation and submit their letters of resignation? No. Instead, we read in verse 3 that . . . *they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.* They preached, and the Lord worked. As we carry out the witness, the Holy Spirit brings the harvest.
- More adversity came as the people of Iconium were divided and the threat of violence became so much that Barnabas and Paul moved on to another city in the region. Notice that all along the way they *continued to preach the gospel* Acts 14:7. They didn't cower in a corner somewhere because adversity didn't prevent them from sharing Jesus. In fact, it just stirred them to preach more.
- Another consequence that came up was . . .

The temptation that comes from the kind of attention they received

- In verse 8 through 18, we heard the account of a crippled man whom Paul healed. First, notice Paul's discernment of the Holy Spirit, *Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well,* Acts 14:9. Here was a man who had been crippled from birth. He had literally never walked. Paul tells him, with great authority, "Stand upright on your feet." Acts 14:10 and the healed man sprang up and began walking around. Here's a man who never learned to walk so it was a double miracle – h is crippled legs were healed AND a man that had never learned how to walk in the first place was walking.
- This presented a different situation for the apostles in the Gentile city. These were worshipers of the Greek gods, Zeus and Hermes, and other various local gods. So, predictably, these pagan people attributed this healing to Zeus. It's an almost comical account. Paul and Barnabas were preaching to locals who spoke in the local dialect, which the apostles did not understand so they didn't catch on right away that they, themselves were the ones being worshipped. Barnabas was apparently a big bearded strong man like Zeus was supposed to be and Paul, who was apparently smaller framed and energetic like the god Hermes, fit that particular description. They realized what was happening when the priest from the Temple of Zeus arrived with bulls to be sacrificed – TO THEM, the apostles of Jesus Christ! They both yelled "Wait a minute. We're not gods. We're men, just like you!" It was everything they could do to calm the people down and stop the adulation and they were only partially successful.
- In the end, it became an opportunity for Paul to preach a different message than what he'd been using before. I've pointed out in the past couple weeks that the message that Paul and Peter and Stephen were preaching was a message that came Genesis all the way through to Jesus. But this was a Gentile crowd and they didn't know the Holy History of Jewish scriptures. This new message was still all truth but, in a way, it was simpler as it told of a God who made Heaven and Earth, and the sea and everything that was in them, and how this loving God, who had a plan for all humanity, had provided a way for them too. Even though we don't have the whole message here, you can see the content and it is a similar message to what Paul shared with the Greek philosophers in Athens on Mars Hill in Acts 17 and we'll talk about it in the message in August probably. The passage ends with *Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.* Acts 14:18.

- These are the kind of situations that missionaries may find themselves in and it would have been tempting for lesser men to take for themselves the adulation and get what they could get out of being gods for these people mistaken souls. Instead, Paul and Barnabas were truly men after God's own heart and they only wanted the Gospel to be preached.

Adversity can also be deadly

- As I pointed out in my opening – sharing Jesus – actually, just being a Christ Follower, can be very dangerous. That's certainly true here. Our text tells us that Jews arrived with the sole purpose of stirring up trouble (Acts 14:19) and they succeeded.
- The people who had only recently been trying to worship them turned against Paul and Barnabas. If that sounds familiar, just think back to Palm Sunday and Good Friday and you'll see how these two were truly Christ FOLLOWERS. In the end they captured Paul and began pelting him with stones – they wanted him dead – and, thinking they had accomplished that, dragged him out of the city. It would seem that he was either stunned or concussed in the very least. But maybe he was actually dead, after all, our text says that they left him for dead outside of the city. As soon as the coast was clear, faithful people, that our scripture describes as disciples, came and prayed for him and he got up and entered the city. Was he healed? Maybe. Was he raised from the dead as his godly friends prayed for him? Maybe that too. Regardless, another miracle happened.
- And think about that – HE WENT BACK INTO THE CITY WHOSE INHABITANTS HAD JUST DID ALL THEY COULD TO MURDER HIM FOR PREACHING THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS CHRIST!!! When the going gets tough, the tough get going – back into action. I want to be just like that when I grow up!
- In the end Barnabas spoke wisdom and they and headed on to another city where they preached the Gospel and *made many disciples*. Acts 14:21. Of course they did!

Conclusion: But it was time to return to home base. These two missionaries were beaten and tired and they needed the rehabilitation of the prayers and fasting of the very saints who had sent them out. I can only imagine the reunion as they returned from their victorious journey for Jesus.

The news they brought was powerful – the Gospel had gone out to Jews AND to Gentiles with no inkling of truth of the one and only God. They gave all the glory to God – as we sang earlier – TO GOD BE THE GLORY, GREAT THINGS HE HAS DONE!

The message goes on. No matter the success or the failure, we are called to go and make disciples. Paul and Barnabas were doing just that. Amen.