

Acts: Expand (Acts 14)

For the week of May 1, 2016

Background

Paul and Barnabas now travel to Iconium. Here we begin to see a key pattern of Pauline ministry. He always chose the largest and most strategic cities in a new region. He would begin a work and from there work outward. Iconium was a prosperous commercial city on a major east-west trade route. Lystra was a smaller town and it had a less educated and sophisticated population.

Read Acts 14:1-7

Some general lessons are learned from Barnabas and Paul's work at Iconium and is applicable and relevant today. Let's take a look:

Lesson #1: The greater the effectiveness of a ministry the greater the resistance and opposition. How is this evident in verses 1-7? Describe a time when you experienced push back from your ministry. Were you surprised? How did you respond?

Lesson #2: Our words must be backed by deeds. What deeds were shown in this passage? Describe how changed lives and ministries that support psychological, social and material needs "back up" the preaching of the gospel and authenticate it.

Lesson #3: The gospel is essentially a "message of grace" (v. 3). How is the gospel a message of grace?

Read Acts 14:8-18

The Lystrans' unwarranted praise kept Barnabas and Paul from presenting the full truth. These people wanted to know this new God only on their own terms. Today, too, Christ is often made a captive of men's presuppositions (what they think he ought to be or what they want him to be) that they really do not understand him. Here is what pastor Lloyd Ogilvie says:

"When Jesus was born there was no room at the inn. But today we not only have room at our inn, but a penthouse suite away from reality. Jesus is a V.I.P. to be honored but not believed or followed. In America, he is a custom but not the true Christ; a captured hero of a casual civil religion, but not Lord of our lives."

1. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?
Write down your thoughts and discuss in your group.

2. What do your non-Christian friends need to understand about God before they can begin to understand the gospel? Are verses 15-17 a good place to start, or do your friends need to begin with something else?

3. How would you start a conversation with your non-Christian friends that could lead to a discussion about the gospel?

Read Acts 14:4-6, 19-20

4. Put yourself in the place of the apostles in these passages. Would you of have kept going? What motivated or enabled the apostles to do so?
5. Now put yourself in the place of the new believers staying in those towns. Would you have withstood the pressure to either abandon your faith in Christ or at a minimum, remain quiet about your faith? What motivated or enabled the believers to stand firm?

Read Acts 14:21-25

6. Make a list of all the principles of "follow-up" that Barnabas and Paul followed after the many were converted. Were you properly "followed up" on when you came to Christ? Do you properly "follow up" with others?

Read Acts 14:26-28

Back at the "home church" they waited and prayed for the return of Barnabas and Paul. When they returned after two plus years, the church gathered to hear the report of what God was doing among the Gentiles. Recently, our "team" that went to Tanzania had a church debriefing (April 17) on their trip.

7. Why is it so important for the church to hear about those who have been sent out on a missionary journey?
8. RiverLakes Church supports numerous missionaries, both in the community, in the United States and the world. In what ways can we, as a church family, support those sent out by RiverLakes Church? Be specific.

Pray

- Pray for our mission effort in Tanzania. Pray for many in our church body to participate in the upcoming Mission Auction on May 13 (all proceeds go towards Tanzania).
- We are all called to be missionaries, whether locally or abroad. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you on where and how you may serve.

Final Thought

The most notable feature of this first missionary journey was the missionaries' sense of divine direction. It was the Holy Spirit who told the church of Antioch to set Barnabas and Saul apart, who sent them out, who led them from place to place and who gave power to their preaching so that converts were made and churches planted. The sending church had committed them to the grace of God for their work (14:26), and when they returned they told "all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles" (14:27).