

Acts 14 (NIV)

In Iconium

1 At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed.

2 But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the other Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.

POISONED THEIR MINDS

The unbelieving Jews went person to person and told untrue things about Paul and his teaching so that no one would listen to what they said. I could imagine the kinds of things they might have said to poison minds.... *"Don't listen to Paul when he comes here, he just wants to grow powerful and throw away our religion. He is teaching against the words of Moses. He is a really good talker so don't listen to him or you will end up leaving the faith and going to hell. Don't listen no matter what he says. You know your dad will kick you out of the family if you listen to Paul."* These are a sample of the different type of pressures that could have been put on those who were on the fence.

But that did not stop Paul and Barnabas because they had God on their side. And many people did receive Christ so there was a good core of people to work with.

3 So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders.

CONSIDERABLE TIME

They spent considerable time there. This is one of the most common phrases when Paul and Barnabas tell of their journeys to win people to Christ and plant churches.

There is no shortcut to growing people in the faith. You must spend considerable time there. Paul and Barnabas always stayed as long as they were able to make sure they grew others strong in the faith. This is the nature of making disciples and mentoring others.

Our best equipping is done in the context of long term relationships and mentoring. When Paul and Barnabas moved on they needed to know that the church would not crumble. Those whom Paul mentored would make certain the church was in good shape while the apostles were away.

CONFIRMING THE MESSAGE

This passage says that God confirmed the message with signs and wonders. God sent miracles to authenticate the message of the prophets and apostles. Jesus authenticated his own ministry with signs and wonders. This is no different.

4 The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. 5 There was a plot afoot among both Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them.

Have you ever wondered how to tell someone they have overstayed their welcome? I think the Jewish leaders figured it out. They plotted to mistreat and stone Paul and Barnabas. I guess their method of getting rid of unwanted company was to kill them. They did not search the scriptures to see if Paul and Barnabas were speaking the truth. They did not allow the strength of their argument either win or lose the debate. They were going to ambush Paul and Barnabas. They escalated to power. When people escalate to power in order to get their way they are almost always being blinded by Satan and driven by their pride or jealousy.

6 But (Paul and Barnabas) found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, 7 where they continued to preach the gospel.

THERE'S A TIME TO STAND AND A TIME TO BOOGY

God did not call Paul on this occasion to stand and face martyrdom. If God had called him to die for the faith Paul would have stayed. So Paul and Barnabas left in a hurry to Lystra.

So let's see what God had in mind at Paul's next stop.

8 In Lystra there sat a man who was lame. He had been that way from birth and had never walked. 9 He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed 10 and called out, “Stand up on your feet!” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

THE LAME MAN'S GIFT

"Paul looked directly at him and saw that he had faith to be healed.." The Holy Spirit gave this lame man the miracle of faith. That was the first miracle. The second miracle was a spiritual gift of discernment given to Paul. And the third miracle was the healing of this man's legs.

ANNOUNCING THE MIRACLE

The gift of faith that God gave the lame man sparked to life Paul's gifts of discernment. And then Paul did what all true prophets and apostles with a gift of healing do; they announce that God is doing a healing so that God gets the credit. It is not that Paul healed anyone. It is that Paul discerned that God was going to heal this man.

Paul gave voice to God's actions. Paul did not speak the healing into existence. Speaking miracles and healing into existence is an occult philosophy. But announcing what God is doing involves spiritual discernment and bold confidence.

KEY TO HEALING

The key to healing is that God is willing to heal someone. That's as complicated as it gets. God is not always willing to heal everyone because then people would come to Christ just to get their healing and then they would abandon Him. Besides that if God healed us every single time we would never die and go to heaven.

But I believe sometimes God is willing to heal people but we do not take the time to pray and fast and seek God's will and discern what He is wanting to do. The Apostle Paul kept himself filled with the Spirit regularly so that He could discern what God wanted to do.

11 When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!” 12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. 13 The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.

IS THIS SOMETHING GOOD?

Because of all the shouting and excitement Paul and Barnabas might have thought something good was happening. Perhaps the people were praising God and would receive Jesus Christ after observing this miracle. But the crowds were not

praising God. Here is some historical information that is important to understand.

ZEUS AND HERMES

In Lystra there was a strongly believed local legend that many years prior to this day Zeus and Hermes appeared to this village. They came and performed miracles. But none of the local residents recognized, praised or made sacrifices to them. According to the legend, there were only two who honored the visiting gods. They were turned into two huge trees and given a place of honor at the edge of this city. The gods were angry that no one else recognized them or received them with honor.

The Lyconian people thought Paul was Hermes the chief speaker and Barnabas was Zeus who had come back to give them a second opportunity to respond with honor, praises and sacrifices. These people were determined that they would not miss the opportunity to praise Zeus and Hermes again.

CAPTURE THE LEADER

The people of this city did not turn to God because of this miracle. Instead they tried to draw Paul and Barnabas into their pagan religion to play roles designed for each of them. They played a game of capture the leader. That's when you grab a leader and try to pressure him into a role or approach that you think he should play. He is not there to lead. He is there to follow

suit with the role you want him in. So how did Paul and Barnabas respond to the roles thrust on them?

14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: 15 “Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them. 16 In the past, he let all go their own way. 17 Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.” 18 Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

WE TOO ARE ONLY HUMAN

Paul and Barnabas tore their clothing as a sign of grief and they shouted and ran with urgency to stop people from sacrificing to them or treating them like gods.

**WE ARE BRINGING GOOD NEWS AND TELLING YOU TO
TURN FROM IDOLS**

Paul and Barnabas told people they do not want anything to do with their pagan system of worship. Paul and Barnabas told

them to leave their worthless pagan system of worship. They reject the titles of Zeus and Hermes.

They began to explain the one true God to the Lyconians based on the way God reveals Himself through nature. But it was not sinking in. Everyone was amazed with the miracle. But they did not connect the miracle with the gospel of Jesus Christ. I guess miracles do not always cause people to believe in Jesus.

19 Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead.

It was not very difficult to win this crowd over. Few people accepted the message of salvation from Paul and Barnabas. Paul and Barnabas spoke against their Greek gods. And this cultural issue about Zeus and Hermes really threw their mission into temporary confusion. It blurred the message.

I could imagine the Jewish leaders coming into the crowds and telling them things like: *“do you hear Paul and Barnabas..they are insulting your gods. They are calling your gods foolish. They are making you look like idiots. Are you going to put up with that? Are you going to allow your god’s to be mocked openly?!”*

Whatever they said worked because the crowds killed Paul and dragged him outside of town.

20 But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city.

Paul was dead. There were several believers that followed he and Barnabas around as they traveled and spoke. These believers gathered around Paul and prayed for him. And Paul pops back up to his feet and cruises back into the city that had just killed him.

Can you imagine seeing a person stoned to death and dragged out of the city. And now here he comes strutting confidently right back into town completely healed of his wounds and ready to share his faith.

Paul's appearance made a statement. *"I will go where God tells me to go and I will not leave one day earlier or later than when He tells me to."*

That is an attitude that all of us could use. We will not come or go one day earlier or later than God tells us to.

(vs20 continued)...The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe. 21 They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples.

So Paul and Barnabas win a large number of people in the city next to Lystra where Paul was raised from the dead.

Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, 22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain

true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said.

Notice their pattern of returning to each place in which they led people to faith in Jesus Christ.

The apostles followed up with those who received Jesus Christ. They spent considerable time mentoring new Christians.

MANY HARSHIPS

Why did Paul speak about the many hardships that one had to go through to enter the kingdom of God?

In this context Paul is warning all the believers that they could be forced to either deny Jesus Christ and leave the faith or confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. By confessing their faith they could face the loss of friends, family and perhaps employment. By confessing Christ they could also face physical or emotional abuse. If you want to follow Jesus Christ it may cost you your dreams and it may even cost you your very life. Don't be surprised when people oppose your faith. Jesus said;

Luke 9:24 NIV

For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.

1 Peter 4:12-13

12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange

were happening to you. 13 But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

So how did Paul find hope in the middle of all of this suffering? Paul wrote;

Romans 8:18

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Paul's focus is not on what people are doing to him. Paul is not a victim. He went into this with the full knowledge that God had called him to suffer many things in the course of sharing the gospel. If Paul was not stoned to death then how could Jesus Christ receive the glory for raising him from the dead? And look at how many came to faith as a result. If Paul was not constantly harassed and verbally abused, how could Paul brag about the endurance and grace that the Lord Jesus gave him.

Paul is not filled with self-pity. If anyone had the right to be filled with self-pity it would be the Apostle Paul. Self pity wears ugly on a believer. Paul would not give into self pity. He would not give into a victim mentality. And neither can we.

God will often call us to do difficult thing. But we can take joy that forever is a long time. And our reward for faithfulness is

forever. That is what Paul was focused on. The reward. The return of Jesus Christ.

Not only would the new believers face persecution. They would also faced confusion as many false teachers would come in after Paul and Barnabas left. So in order to protect the believers and help them grow and organize their efforts, verse 23 tells us; **23 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.**

Paul knew that with no leadership structure churches could not survive the pressures put on it by the synagogues and by false teachers. The first duty of the elders is to guard the doctrine.

APPOINTED ELDERS

Paul and Barnabas set up an Elder based church governance for every single church. This pattern was carried over from the Jewish elder system. Paul and Barnabas appointed the elders.

The biggest part of nominating and placing leaders involves observe who is already leading. Who do people go to when they need advice? Who is able to teach and explain the faith to others? Who is able to give good advice to others? Who is objective and is honest with themselves and others? Who seems to make wise decisions in their family and business and personal life? Those

who were leading were appointed or affirmed as elders and leaders.

One of the best ways to not get appointed and recognized as a leader is to do nothing. Do not serve others. Do not participate. Do not mentor or teach and offer yourself to cell groups or ministries. And then you will be certain to not be recognized as a leader.

So Elders were appointed and churches were given enough structure to function and guard the doctrine and encourage godly living.

24 After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, 25 and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. 26 From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. 27 On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

****MAP****

PAUL'S 1ST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Let's take a quick look at their journey. First Paul and Barnabas leave from Antioch in Syria. They are sent by the congregation and the Spirit of God on this 2 year 1400 mile

journey. They travel to Crete and win the governor and many people to Christ. Then they leave for modern day Turkey and travel to several cities. On the way home they return to each city as long as they are able.

They provide leadership and structure so that the church is able to sustain and guide itself. They establish churches that can sustain themselves and win more people to Christ.

GATHERED AND REPORTED

Paul and Barnabas did not go on this mission trip their own. They were sent by all the people of the church in Antioch of Syria. The church in Antioch sent them with money and materials they might need and the church constantly prayed for Paul and Barnabas occasionally receiving updates from the mission field.

If you were sent by the people of a specific church then you return to that church and report all that God had done in your journeys.

We have sent Jasmine Swope and Randy Vandeloo and their daughter and others from this church. And in a few weeks you are going to hear their stories highlighted so we can hear about all that is occurring in their mission field.

28 And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

Antioch becomes one of the world centers for the faith for about 1300 years until it was overrun by an Islamic war. This has

a lot to do with the investment made by Paul and Barnabas. Actually Paul and Barnabas were in individual churches including this one mentoring and training and teaching for many more years than they were on the road. Most of their work is in the local church. You don't send someone into the mission field that doesn't know how to related to the local church. After all, the goal of missions is to win people to Christ and then organize them into a church.

SUMMARY

So Paul and Barnabas travel to Iconium and win a huge number of people to Christ. Eventually they discovered a plot to kill them. So they left abruptly.

They arrived at Lystra and began preaching the gospel to anyone that would listen. As they are preaching Paul noticed a lame man in the audience that has been given the miracle of faith to be healed. Paul announces that God is healing this man. He tells the man to stand up. And God heals this man. The crowds erupts with amazement. However, they mistake Paul and Barnabas for the Greek gods Hermes and Zeus. They try to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas but Paul and Barnabas will have none of it.

So some of the Jewish leaders from the previous city followed Paul and Barnabas and they jump in and win the crowd

over. They convince the crowd to kill Paul. And that is exactly what happens.

But some of the believers that accompanied Paul prayed over him. And Paul suddenly springs up and walks right back into the city. Paul will not let anyone run him off until God tells him it is time to leave. I'm sure those who were believers in the city took courage from Paul's sudden rise from the dead. Paul promised suffering to those who lived for the Lord. But we also looked at some passages that reminded us that any suffering we go through in this world does not compare to the rewards and blessings that will be in heaven. The lesson is that we should invest in eternity rather than seeking all of our blessings, pleasures and rewards in this life. And we also learned that Paul was not a man of self pity. He counted his suffering joy because he kept his mind on his eternal reward.

Then Paul and Barnabas hit another city before backtracking and revisiting all the churches that they had planted. They appointed elders in each city so that the churches would not be chaotic and would have enough structure to survive with leaders who could help guard the doctrine from false teachers.

Then they return home and once again took their place in the local church mentoring, teaching, encouraging and sharing Christ with other believers.

TAKING IT HOME

1. Is your heart and mind ready to face persecution, harassment or even worse for your faith? (If you are not ready to face persecution then you are not going to have the courage to tell others about Christ or do the hard things God is calling you to do)
2. When you face resistance for your faith what is your response? Do you shrink in fear and self pity? Or so you
3. As you go through your day, do you seek to discern what God wants to do? If not, how is it possible to be obedient and walk in God's power and blessings and joy?
4. Are you engaged with other believers in such a way that you are certain to grow and mature in your faith?
5. Did you realize that Paul's pattern was always to appoint elders for every church that was planted?
6. Did you realize that the best way to be appointed as a leader is to begin living the life of a leader right where you are?