

Text: Acts 14:1-7

Title: Bold and Steadfast Ministry in Iconium

Truth: We should follow the missionary example of the apostles.

Date/Location: Wednesday 5/22/2013 and 5/29/2024 at FBC

Introduction

After shaking the dust off their feet at Antioch, the missionaries went on to Iconium, a city southeast of Antioch. They could rejoice that they left behind in Antioch a core group of disciples who were joyful and filled with God's Spirit.

I. Verse 1: Salvation in the Synagogue

A. Paul and Barnabas continued their habit of teaching in the synagogues when they first entered a region (Acts 9:20, 13:5, 14).

Note a detail here: NKJV/ESV/NAS has "they went together to the synagogue" whereas NIV/NET have something like "they went as usual to the synagogue." The Greek text can be taken both ways, and there are good reasons for both translations. I lean toward the NIV since there would be no reason to think that they would go into the synagogue separately, or that they would have separate ministry in the city since that was not their pattern.

B. The result of their ministry was a multitude of Jews and Greeks believed the gospel. They turned to Jesus Christ in repentance and faith. They recognized Him as Lord and Savior. They acknowledged His resurrection.

C. They spoke "in such a way" that this happened. Luke records that they "so spoke that a great multitude" believed. This encourages all of us—as ones who explain the gospel—to do so thoughtfully, thoroughly, carefully, persuasively, etc. so as to encourage people to believe. The manner and effectiveness of their speech caused me to pause here to ask myself how I could speak "in such a way." Thoughts:

1. The effectiveness is primarily in the message. It is the power of God to salvation (Rom 1:16). Should my manner be imperfect, that will not halt the message. Furthermore, the Spirit of God is the One who applies the message to the heart of the unbeliever.
2. The unbelieving audience is not the best judge of what the speaker should be like. For example, consider 1 Cor. 2:1-2 and 2 Cor. 10:10. The audience may be engaged or not engaged.
3. But my manner of speaking can enhance or detract from the message.

4. The content must be accurate along with the manner. We need to work at preaching the gospel clearly and enthusiastically, and not coercively or deceptively. In presenting, we should not say what the gospel is not. It is not health and wealth in the presentation, and only later you find out you got something different. It should not be boring, but it should not be entertaining either. All errors are to be avoided because the gospel deals with life and death matters.

II. Verse 2: Opposition from the Jews

- A. There are always at least two groups when you present the gospel—those who receive it gladly, and those who hate it. There may also be a group in the middle, but the bottom line is that the third group are in the unbelieving category as well.

Let us in our minds be crystal clear about this: if you respond favorably to the news about Jesus, you are responding favorably to Him. If you reject the gospel news about Jesus, you are rejecting Him. Rejecting the gospel is not a mere rejection of information. This is a *personal* rejection. It is a thumbing the nose at a Person. Let me illustrate it like this: it is one thing to tell someone off by text message or email. It is entirely another thing to tell people *to their face* that you reject them. They amount to the same thing, but they feel much different. So you can reject the information about Jesus now in an abstract way, but you will have to speak with Him directly, face to face, about this at some point in the future.

- B. Sometimes the hater group is mad enough that they will stir up trouble. That is what happened here. The unbelieving Jews = the ones to were disobedient to the gospel message—they refused it—caused bitterness and anger in the Gentiles of the town. This poison of bitterness and anger negatively affected the mindset of many people in the community against the missionaries and the newborn church.

III. Verse 3: Response to Opposition

- A. It seems paradoxical that in the face of opposition, Paul and Barnabas stayed there a long time. The size of the harvest in v. 1 was the great reason to stay on. Opposition, while unpleasant, may indeed indicate that you are doing something right. After all, those who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (2 Tim 3:12).
- B. They spoke boldly/openly in the Lord. They were not shy about bringing the message of the good news. That's an example and application for us. Are you bold, or has society convinced you to keep your faith to yourself?

- C. The Lord supported their ministry by granting “signs and wonders” to be done through them. This would include things like healing (14:8), punishment (13:11), casting out demons (16:18), and a variety of other unusual miracles (19:11-12).

We do not have the promise or presence of such miraculous support in our ministries today. The Lord gives us additional support (on top of the Scriptures!) by means of the miraculous testimony of every Christian to our changed lives by the power of the gospel.

IV. Verses 4-7: Forced to Leave

- A. The division in the city continued for all this time, during which a large group of Jews, Gentiles, and rulers conspired to kill Paul. They made an “attempt” on Paul and Barnabas’ lives. That is attempted murder, right? Their hearts were inclined, through their hatred, to murder these men (Matthew 5:21-22).
1. I marvel that someone would be so hate-filled as to want to kill another person because of his or her religious beliefs. This is so antithetical to our God-given Christian values that it just does not make sense to my mind. But we have to be open to that reality. People are not “good.” Maybe you are blind to it and say “they could not be thinking that,” but in fact they can be “thinking that.”
 2. Realize that John 16:2-3 is still true. Unbelievers do not know God, nor accept His moral standard, and thus can do such wicked without even thinking twice about it. Jesus was right—again—in John 8:44.
- B. When the conspiracy was discovered, the missionaries fled for their lives to continue ministering the gospel elsewhere.
1. In Antioch, Paul and Barnabas were expelled from the region.
 2. In Iconium, an attempt was made to abuse and stone them.
 3. In Lystra, the enemies of the gospel from all three locations teamed up and succeeded in carrying out the stoning of Paul.
 4. They must have really hated Paul and his message to go to such lengths as following after him to kill him!
- B. A fledgling church had been started and begun to be established with teaching for a good number of weeks and probably months. It would be responsible for “batting cleanup” and allowing Paul and Barnabas to continue on their way to the next cities.

Conclusion

Follow the apostolic example (1 Cor. 11:1, Philippians 3:17): Speak boldly for Christ. Do not give up in the face of opposition. In fact, expect it and know that some will be poisoned against you. Leave when you have to. Go on to new territory if the old is closed or already covered by other sound ministries.

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