

# THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

## JUNE 13TH-14TH // BOOK OF ACTS

### ICONIUM (ACTS 14:1-7)

Paul and Barnabas continue their missionary travels by heading to Iconium.

- Iconium was a Greek city-state located in modern-day Turkey.
- As usual, Paul and Barnabas visited the Jewish synagogue to share the gospel (v. 1a).
- As they did, a “great number” of Jews and Greeks believed—but anytime there is fruitful ministry, there is also opposition.

Almost immediately, unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the missionaries (v. 2).

- There is great power in who we allow to speak into our lives and influence us.
- Anyone can have their thinking poisoned toward God, the Church, other Believers, certain groups of people, and biblical truth, simply by letting the wrong people and voices influence them.

### “POISONED THEIR MINDS...”

Today, this happens primarily through our social media algorithms.

- If you fill your mind with cynical, angry, materialistic, lustful, or anti-faith content daily, your perspective on God, others, the Church, and the Christian life will be warped.
- We all must actively audit who we follow and what voices we allow to influence our minds.

### STAYING OBEDIENT AND FAITHFUL

Paul and Barnabas extended their stay in Iconium to boldly speak on behalf of the Lord.

- God honored their grit and willingness to fight for the truth by granting signs and wonders to be performed through them (v. 3).
  - God always rewards faithfulness; He will step in and fight our battles when we simply choose to stay obedient.
- Ultimately, the city split right down the middle—half sided with the Jewish leaders, and half with the apostles (v. 4).
- Amidst this deep division, a plot formed to mistreat and stone the missionaries, forcing them to flee the city to Lystra and Derbe (vs. 5–6).
  - This escape wasn't an act of cowardice; it was a strategic move for the good of the overall missionary journey.

### A DIVISIVE MESSAGE (MATTHEW 10:34-36)

The Reality: No matter how beautifully you present Jesus, some people (even some who call themselves Christians) will despise the gospel and hate you for living it.

- The Cost: Getting serious about your faith will always demand some level of sacrifice.
- The Reward: When we commit to the truth and stay obedient, God will always honor us.

### ZEUS AND HERMES? (ACTS 14:8-18)

#### IN LYSTRA

Lystra was a small market town (2,000–5,000 people) and Roman military colony in the region of Lycaonia (modern-day Turkey).

- Unlike other cities Paul and Barnabas had visited, it had no Jewish synagogue.
- This culture would have been familiar with itinerant philosophers and orators speaking in public places, so this is how Paul shared.

A man who had been lame from birth was listening to Paul's words.

- It was obviously the Holy Spirit who gave Paul the ability to see what was happening in the spiritual realm—this lame man had faith to be healed (v. 9).
- Paul commanded him to stand up, and the man immediately jumped up and began to walk around (v. 10).

As the man crippled from birth stood up, the crowd went crazy and began to cry out in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!” (v. 11).

- They named Barnabas “Zeus” and Paul “Hermes” because he was the chief speaker (v. 12).
- Then the priest of Zeus brought oxen and garlands and attempted to offer to them a sacrifice (v. 13).

“According to the legend, Zeus and Hermes once came to ‘the Phrygian hill country’ disguised as mortals seeking lodging. Though they asked at a thousand homes, none took them in. Finally, an elderly couple freely welcomed them with a banquet. In appreciation, the gods transformed the cottage into a temple with a golden roof and marble columns...as for the inhospitable people, the gods destroyed their houses” (Longenecker, 435).

### INTEGRITY AMIDST TEMPTATION

What kind of perks could Paul and Barnabas have received from this little town? *Who else from the church would have found out about it?*

- Instead of soaking in the fame and public worship, the apostles tore their clothes in deep grief over the people's idolatry (v. 14).
- Paul and Barnabas were heartbroken over these people's spiritual ignorance and darkness.

Praise and recognition are incredibly addictive drugs; no matter how much we get, we always crave a little bit more.

- It required integrity and supernatural strength for Paul and Barnabas to resist the trap of applause and to actively preach against the very people idolizing them.
- Paul corrected the crowd, stating they were just ordinary men (v. 15).

There is one true God who created the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them.

- The Lystrans believed in many gods and had no knowledge of the only true God.
- In the past, God had allowed the pagan nations to “go their own way” (v. 16).
- God had always left a witness to Himself via “common grace” by providing rain, food, and good harvests (v. 17).

### TURNING FROM WORTHLESS THINGS

What “worthless things” do we attribute god-like status to in Western civilization? (Entertainment, money, sex, drunkenness, power, fame, etc.)

- The call of the gospel is to turn from functional saviors and embrace the real Savior, Jesus.
- Giving ourselves to “worthless things” is the very definition of idolatry. Worthless things are *tyrannical* gods!

### PERSECUTION (ACTS 14:19-23)

Wherever the early missionaries traveled, their enemies weren't far behind.

- Even though Lystra was a stronghold of paganism, this didn't stop antagonistic Jews from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium.
- They not only convinced the crowd that these two weren't gods but that they were imposters and troublemakers. Since Paul did most of the talking, he bore the wrath of the lynch mob.

Paul was dragged out of the city and stoned, a form of capital punishment.

- The mob *thought* Paul was dead, but he wasn't. He rose up and reentered the city with Barnabas the next day (vs. 19b–20).
- That leaves us with so many questions! Was Paul's rising back up some form of miracle? Was his deliverance and reentry into the city a miracle? Yes to both.

Some commentators even suggest that Paul might have undergone a near death, out-of-body experience on this occasion, which he describes in 2 Corinthians 12:1–4.

- Maybe, in the moments while his friends stood by helplessly thinking he was dead, Paul went to Heaven and “*heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter*” (2 Cor. 12:4, ESV).
- Maybe this inspired him to keep going.

We can't say for sure, but apparently Paul saw, heard, or knew something that made reentering the city after he had been stoned, and continuing to travel to preach the gospel, seem worth it.

- The most glorious and enjoyable moment of your life here on earth is the tiniest fraction of a fraction of the glory that will be in the life to come for those who are in Christ.

Paul understood this, and as he continued his travels to Derbe and back to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, he continued to preach the gospel, make disciples, and plant churches.

- Their ministry was not just to make new converts but to establish healthy churches.
- In each church, Paul and Barnabas appointed godly leaders (elders), prayed and fasted for them, and committed them to the Lord (v. 23).

### SPIRITUAL GRIT

Paul's message to the Christians in these new churches was “It is necessary to go through many hardships” (v. 22).

- Paul knew what he was talking about!
- It is as if Paul knew that no matter how difficult the journey may be, the end destination will make everything worth it.
- What hardships are we willing to endure?

### HOMECOMING (ACTS 14:24-28)

#### BACK IN ANTIOCH (V. 26).

Eventually, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch (the church that had originally sent them out).

- They were welcomed home, and they gave a full report of everything God had accomplished during their journey.

The entire trip had taken just over a year and covered 1,400 miles across land and sea.

Paul and Barnabas's report to their home church was that “God...had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles” (v. 27).

- Antioch had been one of the first multicultural congregations in the early church, a place where Jews and Gentiles worshipped together freely.
- It makes a lot of sense that God would have chosen this church to be the launchpad for missionary work to the Gentile world.

Paul and Barnabas returned home and most likely resumed their pastoral duties for about a year's time, resting and ministering in Antioch.

- It was around this time that Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians.
- For the most part, they probably spent the year getting some much needed rest and renewed fellowship with their friends in Antioch (“considerable time with the disciples”, v. 28).

Even the most spiritual amongst us have human needs like rest, friendship, and community.

- There is absolutely no shame in being humble enough to rest and admit our limitations.
- Serving the Lord over the duration of a lifetime requires being humble and wise enough to set boundaries and seek out support systems.
- If you're actively serving, when is your Sabbath? Who is your spiritual support system?

### OBEDIENCE, FAITHFULNESS, WISDOM, AND GRIT

- For every Christian, God has a unique calling and plan for their life to serve His Kingdom.
- To fulfill that call over the duration of our lifetime, it takes more than good intentions and words.
- It takes obedience—we must respond to the call and do something.
- It takes faithfulness and grit—we must keep going and resist the temptation to quit when it's hard.

### PURSUE INTEGRITY (GUARD YOUR HEART AND MIND)

- Paul and Barnabas could have given in to the temptation to be made into gods and no one from the church would have had to know, but this would have destroyed their ministry!
- Audit your influences. Is anything poisoning your mind/heart? Resist the idols of applause and performance. Turn from what is worthless—manmade idols make tyrannical gods.

### CHOOSE SUSTAINABILITY (MARATHON, NOT 5K)

- We all need spiritual community—it's pure foolishness and pride to try to follow Christ without a support system.
- We need a sustainable pace and a spiritual practice of rest. A sustainable spiritual pace will have a healthy rhythm of time with Jesus, time with Christian community, time to serve, and time to Sabbath and be human.

### CONSIDER THE GREATER REWARD

- All things of value come with a cost.
- We embrace persecution, embarrassment, humiliation, fatigue, conflict, or whatever else goes along with being a faithful witness to Jesus because the world **DESPERATELY** needs the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- In Heaven, it will all be worth it. *Whose strength are you leaning into for spiritual endurance?*