

EXPOSITION OF ACTS

Message #31

Acts 14:1-28

There is no denying the fact that we live in a religious world filled with all kinds of religious beliefs. We have Muslims, Mormons, Christian Science, Jehovah's Witness, Catholics and Charismatics. Now what should be our strategy to reach this world? Should we study all of the beliefs of false religions and try to combat them? Should we sign up for university classes to study all religions of the world? If we were to pose that question to the Apostle Paul, he would say, what I did is go from place to place and accurately preach God's Word. That is what he did and that is what God blessed.

One of the things that we may all notice in reading theological material is that more and more of it seems to be doing its best to discuss all of the new religious fads of the world. There are some who seem to think that it is their job to try to figure out ways to make Christianity relevant in the midst of these new fads.

But we must wonder whatever happened to the Pauline philosophy that says you go everywhere and accurately preach and teach God's Word? That is exactly what Paul did everywhere he went. He did not go to places to try to figure out what new religious things people believed. He went there with the sole focus of preaching and teaching God's Word. Why? Because that is exactly what it is that produces faith. **Faith comes by hearing the Word, not by hearing about the latest religious fad (Romans 10:17).** There are many missionaries who need a good dose of Acts because they think their real strength lies in their ability to build relationships. Their real strength lies in preaching God's Word. You must wonder if they have ever read Acts.

This is a fascinating passage because we get to see the methods of Paul, the message of Paul and the response he often received when he and Barnabas presented that message. Paul was the most impacting preacher and teacher to ever live. He boldly proclaimed the Word of God no matter where he was and it did not matter to him what people thought about him, said about him, or tried to do to him. What we learn from a passage like this is this:

THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO IMPACT THE WORLD IS TO ACCURATELY PREACH AND TEACH GOD'S WORD AND GOD'S GRACE TO IT, AND THOSE WHO DO THIS WILL NEED TO TOTALLY DEPEND ON GOD BECAUSE THERE WILL BE OPPOSITION.

We may remember that Paul had an impacting ministry in Antioch through preaching. So one question which surfaces is why he left it. Why did Paul leave Antioch? The answer is because the religious people didn't like him or his message of grace versus their message of works and law, and they ran Paul and Barnabas out of town (13:50). These men were persecuted for preaching the grace of God. If we present grace to religious people who are dedicated to their church and religion, we will likely receive the same response. In this text there are five missionary moves that Paul makes. These moves Paul made are all located today in modern day Turkey:

MISSIONARY MOVE #1 - Paul leaves Antioch and goes to Iconium . 14:1-5

Paul and Barnabas were not discouraged, they simply packed up and moved about eighty-five miles to the SE and came to Iconium. Iconium was one of the oldest cities in the world and was known for its Greek culture. The people were proud and sophisticated. Iconium was a city located in the Roman province of Galatia. It was a beautiful city that sat on a plateau surrounded by fertile plains and plush forests. It was a prosperous commercial and agricultural city. People who lived there had a good life.

According to **verse 1**, Paul went to the synagogue and he presented the grace Gospel and large numbers of people believed; both Jews and Greeks. The grace Gospel is not some bland message of dead religion. It is alive and it cuts open souls. One thing Luke does over and over again in Acts is to stress the impact that the true preaching of God's Word had on all kinds of people in the world. Over and over again he stresses that the preaching and teaching of God's Word is what really produced growth. **A true biblical, Pauline strategy for real growth in the church is to preach God's Word.** That is exactly what Paul did everywhere he went.

But you will notice in **verse 2** that the unbelieving Jews started stirring up trouble. In direct opposition to the preaching of the Word of God these phony religious leaders went after people's minds and souls in an attempt to embitter people against them. This is so important because phony religious leaders to this day still prey on people's emotions. They will do whatever it takes to keep people from understanding truth. **The primary source of this opposition to biblical grace was religious Jews; not the heathen Gentiles.**

However, according to **verse 3**, that did not stop Paul from boldly preaching and teaching for a long time in Iconium. One true evidence of the power of God is a boldness to proclaim the truth in the face of evil hostility.

Now Paul was proclaiming this at a time when there were no Bibles, and therefore God permitted him to perform apostolic signs and wonders to bear witness to the authenticity to the message of "grace." As John Calvin said, the true purpose of these signs was "establishing the Gospel in its full and genuine authority." When these apostolic signs were operative with Paul and Barnabas, not one word of the New Testament had been written. **Those miraculous apostolic signs and wonders confirmed they were telling the truth before the Scriptures were written.** Once the Scriptures were written the miraculous gifts ceased (I Corinthians 13:10).

According to **verse 4**, the city of Iconium was split and there was actually a plot to stone Paul. Jesus, in talking about His first coming to this world said I did not come to bring peace to families, I came to divide them (Matthew 10:34). In other words, when it comes to Jesus Christ there is no neutrality. You either believe in Him or you don't. That was the Gospel Paul was presenting and that message split the city and the people wanted to stone him.

Why did they want to stone him? He is accurately teaching truth about the grace of God. This is so ironic because the reason he went into Iconium was to preach and the reason he eventually left Iconium was because of his preaching.

When Paul and Barnabas learned of the plot to kill them, they left Iconium and fled to the cities of Lycaonia of Lystra and Derbe. **By the way, the reason they fled was because they were prudent, not because they were cowards.** Neither Paul nor Barnabas was afraid of anything because wherever they went they preached and taught God's Word regardless of opposition.

If we are going to be an effective witness for Jesus Christ we will need some backbone. We will need to take a stand

MISSIONARY MOVE #2 - Paul leaves Iconium and eventually goes to Lystra. **14:6-20a**

Verse 6 is one of the key verses that God used to actually save the liberal archaeologist and historian William Ramsey (1831-1939). Ramsey was a liberal skeptic and he decided to track Paul's movements with the goal of proving the Bible to be wrong. Acts 14:6 says that both Lystra and Derbe were in Lycaonia, and many other documents Ramsey read claimed that Lystra was in the province of Pisidia and Derbe was in the province of Lycaonia. When he got to these cities he discovered that the ancient boundary markers had been moved and between the years A.D. 37-72, Lystra and Derbe were in the same province. Luke was precisely right. Both cities were in the same province. This led Ramsey to become a staunch defender of the accuracy of God's Word.

Now Lystra was smaller than Antioch and it was somewhat of a backwoods type of city. Kent Hughes said he imagined it to be a sort of "old west" kind of city. It was located about a marathon distance (twenty-six miles) away from Iconium. It was a Roman colony city. Now there weren't too many Jews in Lystra; however, this was the city that was home to a Jewess named Eunice and Lois, whose son and grandson was Timothy (II Tim. 1:5). It is interesting that there is no synagogue there because this was a city given to Greek mythology.

According to **verses 8-9**, Paul was preaching in Lystra, and while he was preaching, there was a man listening to Paul that he says who had been crippled from birth. The text says this man was "listening." The emphasis of the Greek text is that this man was listening intently to Paul's exposition of God's Word and God's grace. He was really zeroed in on what Paul was preaching and teaching.

Paul apparently fixed his gaze on him and he became aware that this man had faith (**v. 9**). Sometimes a minister can tell who is really tuned in to the Word of God and who isn't. This man was listening and he believed so in **verse 10**, Paul said stand up on your feet and the man jumped up and began to walk. **The power of God's Word can and will change lives immediately.**

Many of you know that this week we received an e-mail from a man who was apparently going to commit suicide. I have no idea how he stumbled onto our web site, but he did. He wrote me to say that he listened to the Word of God and God saved him. He said if it weren't for the message on the web site, I would not be here. That is the power of the Word of God. It instantly changes lives.

Now the people of this part of the world were thrilled and impressed and they viewed Paul and Barnabas as “gods” and they called Barnabas, Zeus, who was the main god of the Greeks and Paul, Hermes, because according to Greek mythology Hermes is the god of speech. Most speculate that Barnabas was physically larger than Paul, but Paul was the main speaker so they gave them these names. They were calling them this in the Lycaonian language (**verse 11**), which apparently Paul and Barnabas did not know.

As a result, according to **verse 13**, the priest of the temple of Zeus brought gifts and wanted to offer a sacrifice to them. Paul and Barnabas were shocked to learn that they wanted to worship them.

Now most people would love to be flattered at this level just one time in their lives. Many a religious leader craves this kind of homage. Some ministers would have rationalized that God has led these people to esteem us and this will open up some great opportunities for our ministry.

But Paul and Barnabas were men of integrity and truth and they tore their robes and rushed out to the people and said don’t do this, we are just sinful men like you. We have a sin nature just like you do. We are mere men. We are preaching the Gospel of grace and if you will believe on Jesus Christ you will have a relationship with the God who made the heaven and earth and all that is in it (**v. 14-15**).

Paul says this God is the one who has permitted all the nations to go their own ways (**v. 16**). He let you worship bizarre stuff, but He always gave you a witness of Himself. He gave you rain and fruitful seasons and he satisfied your hearts with food and moments of gladness (**v. 17**). **Most people don’t realize the hand of God giving them good things in their lifetime.**

With great difficulty they were able to quiet down the crowd. But you will notice from **verse 19** that Jews from Antioch were tracking Paul. Now these Jews had traveled over 100 miles in order to stir up the people against Paul and kill him, and they actually stoned him and dragged him out of the city thinking he was dead. There is some debate over whether or not Paul was actually dead here. It is possible that this was the moment when Paul was caught up to the third heaven (II Cor. 12:1-4). In II Cor. 11:25, he does refer to the fact that he was stoned, so it is possible. Now this whole thing is going to backfire.

According to **verse 20**, believers from Lystra were standing around what they thought to be Paul’s dead body. Probably thinking if he would have just kept his mouth shut he would have been okay. If he wouldn’t have preached so strong, everything would have been fine. As they were standing around the body of Paul, he stood up. He probably dusted himself off, went back into the city and the next day took off for Derbe. **Opposition has never hindered the growth of the church; it has always enhanced it.** Churches that accurately preach God’s Word grow even when negative things happen.

MISSIONARY MOVE #3 - Paul leaves Lystra and goes to Derbe. 14:20b-21a

They traveled sixty miles to the SE to Derbe. Paul preached there and many came to faith in Jesus Christ. There was not one thing that anyone could do to Paul or say about Paul that would stop him from preaching God's Word. Do you see what his philosophy of ministry actually is? Preach and teach God's Word.

MISSIONARY MOVE #4 - Paul retraces his steps to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. 14:21b-25

Now what is interesting geographically is that from Derbe, Paul could have traveled an easy 150 miles straight east and gone to Tarsus, his home town, and then back to Antioch, which was his goal. But instead he decides to revisit the places that had chased him away. Why, because he wanted to give further instruction to each of these churches.

Kenneth Gangel told a story of a man who was walking on the beach by the ocean and he saw a starfish and he picked it up and put it back into the water. A little boy saw him do it and asked "why did you do that?" The man said because the tide is going out and it would be stranded here and would die. The boy said, well what difference would it make if you throw one starfish into the ocean when there are thousands of starfish in the ocean? The man said, "It makes a great difference to this one."

What difference did it make for Paul to backtrack to these cities that had treated him so rudely and roughly? It made a great difference to those believers in those churches. He backtracked to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch and he traveled through the states of Pisidia and Pamphylia and went all the way back to the port city of Perga. They gave believers encouragement and teaching (v. 22) and they organized the church (v. 23) and they prayed (v. 23). Paul taught them the importance of God's Word and prayer in His church. He was not putting on discipleship seminars; he was grounding them in the Word of God.

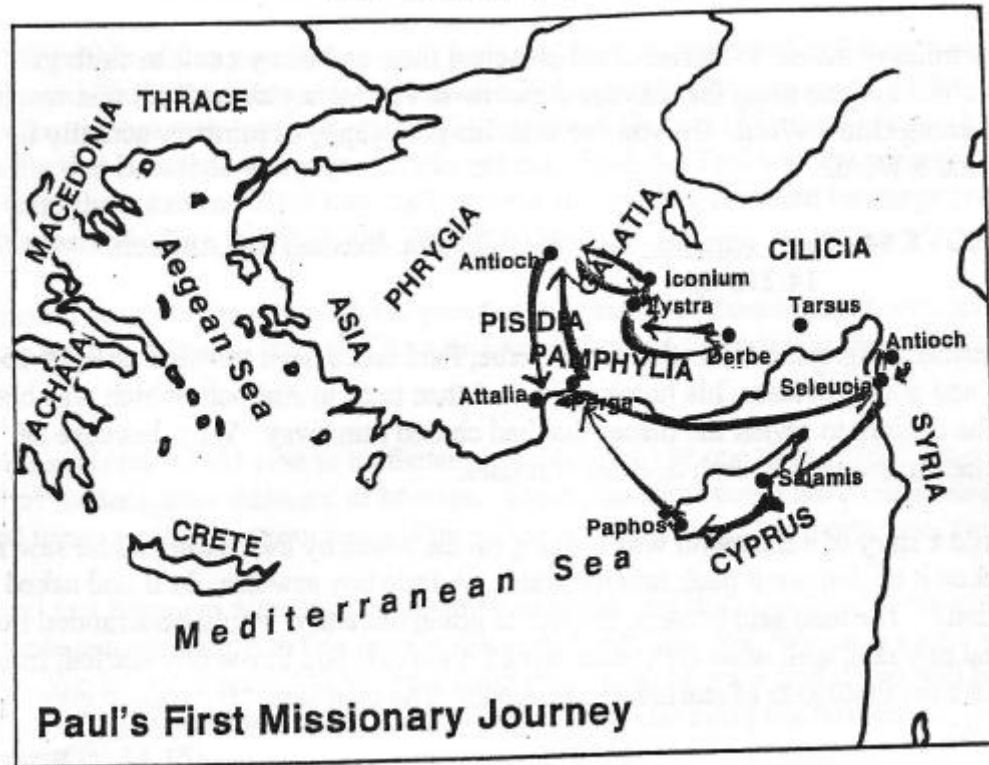
MISSIONARY MOVE #5 - Paul leaves Perga and goes to Attalia and sails back to his home church of Antioch. 14:25-28

Now here is the first missionary conference ever held in a local church. According to **verse 27**, when they got back to Antioch of Syria, they gathered the church together and they gave a full report of all God had done in opening up the Gospel of grace to the Gentile world. Notice from verse 27, the Gospel of grace is the Gospel of faith. Not works, nor merit, not law. The grace Gospel is the faith Gospel. Faith alone, in Christ alone.

According to **verse 28** they spent a long time in Antioch preaching and teaching God's Word. In fact, it is very probable that during this time he wrote his letter to the Galatians.

The Gospel of God's grace will generate a response of some sort. When God's Word is accurately taught, it is not neutral. There will be responses and responses will vary. Some will love it and believe. Some will hate it and reject. Some will oppose it and oppose you. But we must never back down or change our philosophy because it is God's Word that produces faith.

NEW TESTAMENT SURVEY



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