

To God be the Glory

Փառքը՝ Միայն Աստուծոյ

Acts 14

Last Sunday we ended chapter 13. I shared four applications:

1. Saul's name is Paul
2. Barnabas took the second chair.
3. Evangelism through the Word of God
4. Joy that comes from Holy Spirit. Thus we can bring the light of Christ into the darkness.

Let us move to chapter 14

-The Way We Share (Iconium) (MODERN KONYA)

At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively (spoke in such a way) 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. (Acts 14:1-2 NIV11)

We read chapter 13 that the **Opposition** came, they **shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium**.

(Let us look to the map)

*"It was about **ninety miles** southeast of Pisidian Antioch.... **Lystra** was less than twenty miles southwest of Iconium. The sixty-three miles from Lystra to Derbe was on unpaved track."¹*

- We don't have the content of their speech, sermon. But Luke describes that they spoke such a way, that many believed, both Jews and Greek-gentiles.

- It is not just what you tell them in the message, **but how you tell them**.

Their "lives spoke" about that message. Paul and Barnabas could give philosophical, rhetorical sermons, and sometimes that was needed (apologetics). Here we find two men, who walked hundreds of miles with the Joy of the Holy Spirit sharing the Good News of the Gospel. Lives were changed....

It is a good lesson to remember how we share. The way we share matters....

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. 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. ⁶ But they 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. (Acts 14:1-7 NIV11)

- Paul and Barnabas continued their mission, stayed there for a while, speaking boldly and confirming the message of GRACE.
- Performing signs of healing was to authenticate their message.
- Yet, the city got divided. **the unbelieving Jews, the unbelieving Gentiles, and their leaders** (united as one force) were ready to take them out of the city
- As I mentioned last week, the Evil will not like the message of Christ to be spread.

- **YET**, nothing can stop the work of God...nothing...

The best way to oppose evil, is to continue the work of God.

Jesus had commanded his disciples: **“When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next”** (Matt 10:23). In this case, they went to three more towns to preach the Good News.

So they left for the other cities of Lystra and Debre (see the map), and continued to preach the Gospel...

The best defense is the good offence.

-To God be the Glory (8-18) (Lystra)

- After each composition **Johann Sebastian Bach** signed **Soli Deo Gloria (SDG)** meaning **to God be the Glory**.

-There is a saying, “It is amazing what Christians can do if they don’t care who takes the credit.”

- In the next section from **8-18**, we find that Paul and Barnabas are in **Lystra** (see the map) and they heal a crippled man.

- We find a similar story with **Peter and John** (Acts 3) who healed a man crippled at birth. “We must keep in mind that one of Luke’s concerns is writing Acts was to vindicate Paul's apostleship.² Luke likes to emphasize the authenticity of Paul as an apostle.

People were amazed by this healing and called them name of gods. **They called Barnabas Zeus, and Paul Hermes**. Even the priest of Zeus was ready to sacrifice an animal.

“Zeus was the most widely worshipped God in Galatia... [and] was often linked with other gods. In the territory of Lystra there are carvings and inscriptions which show Zeus accompanied by Hermes.”³

Paul and Barnabas could not understand the language of the people. It was “the Lycaonian language” (v. 11). Then they realized what was happening.

Don't you love this. Paul and Barnabas instead of using this as an opportunity to be glorified, tore their clothes, which is a Jewish reaction for blasphemy... they said:

“But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, “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. (Acts 14: 14,15 NIV)

Paul is introducing Yahweh to this crowd. “God is the Creator of everything that there is (v. 15), whose influence as sustainer of creation is felt throughout the whole world (vv. 16–17). He is also the living God, who calls us to turn to him in repentance (v. 15).”⁴

Glory to God.

Illustration:

Last year I received a request to pray for a lady from Armenia who was hospitalized for a procedure. I prayed with her over the phone. The next week she went to the hospital for checkup, and doctors were surprised that she was healed. This year we saw her in person. She kept thanking me for the miraculous prayer. I insisted that it is not my prayer that healed her. **It is God, and our faith in God though Christ.** It gave me opportunity to talk to her about faith in Christ. Can I be honest with you, I liked that praise, “My PRAYER healed her”, hmmm you see how the Devil works...

Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them. (Acts 14:18)

-There were stoned

Again, one more time opposition appeared and:

They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. ²⁰ But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe. (Acts 14:19,20 NIV11) after each composition

Just think about the commitment of the apostles. Opposition came so severe, that they used the OT style of punishment: they stoned Paul. Thinking he was dead, they left him.

How ironic is this situation: once upon a time Paul was dragging Christians outside from their homes (Acts 8:3); once upon a time Paul witnessed the stoning of Stephen.

Now he was stoned.

- But the disciples gathered around him and lifted him up. An amazing rescue team who put their own lives in danger to protect Paul.

Nothing stops the Word of God from spread... The next day, a new journey to **Debre**.

Derbe, about 60 miles southeast of Lystra. And over there they did not face opposition.

-Time to go home, end of first journey (Not the easy way)

They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. 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. (Acts 14:21-22 NIV11)

Two observations in this section:

a. They chose to visit their churches again.

Paul and Barnabas could go to **Antioch of Syria** (their mother church) in a faster way. They could go to Tarsus, and from there to Antioch of Syria.

No, they chose to take the tougher way. Why?

They went back to each city that they preached the Gospel.

From Lystra to Iconium, then to **Pisidian Antioch**.

Why?

b. Here are the reasons:

1. To strengthen the disciples...
2. To encourage (*parakaleo*) and exhort them to remain faithful in their faith.
3. Hardship will be their lifestyle... no easy way in the kingdom of God...
4. To organize the church leadership (the elders)

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. (Acts 14:23 NIV11)

The newly established churches needed leadership. Please remember the NT was not in their hands. So, they had the OT and the teachings of Paul. They appointed elders for the leadership of the church.

In the letter to **Timothy** Paul writes about the characteristics of an **elder**. Here we see how they do it, in prayer and fasting. It is the foundation of searching God's will in our daily walk. We can do nothing without prayer and fasting.

Those leaders were committed to the LORD.

-Eventually they arrived in Antioch of Syria:

²⁶ 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. ²⁸ And they stayed there a long time with the disciples. (Acts 14:26-28 NIV11)

Application

1. Paul could heal the crippled person. I think God granted Paul and the Apostles with the special gift of healing.

I don't think we all have healing gifts. Yet, this does not mean we should not pray for people who need healing. We are called to fast and pray. I think we all can do that.

2. We should not compromise the message of the Gospel. Paul prepared the church that they would face tough days. As you can see, this is not the prosperity Gospel. The message **is a liberating message**, but to walk in our faith is costly. Having said this, we find that the Gospel message divided the society. Some believed and some did not and became the opposition.

It is a tragedy that it divided the city; sometimes the gospel message can bring division; make sure it is not a division because of character and ego ...

I pray that I'll be faithful pastor to you preaching the Gospel without softening the message.

3. The way we say, the way we proclaim is extremely important. The way Paul and Barnabas preached made a difference. I want to learn from them. Humility and kindness, and whenever needed, raising our voices.

1. Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary*, Acts P 398
2. R.C. Sproul, *You Will Be My Witness to the End of the Earth Acts* P218
3. G. Walter Hansen, "Galatia," BAFCS, 2:393, from: *The NIV Application Commentary*, Acts P399
4. Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary*, Acts P 400

Reflecting on these events at the end of his life Paul would write Timothy:

You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured.

Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. (2 Tim 3:10-13 NIV)