

32—Acts 14.1-7—Patterns of Messenger Work

- I. Introduction
 - a. We've been given the task to be messengers of the gospel. Yet, this call is to shine the light in the darkness and the darkness doesn't like the light. It is also a task for which God is with us. It will succeed. There is a certainty that Jesus will be victorious.
 - b. Like last week's message, we need to acknowledge the difficult realities in this present world. Following Jesus is hard. Mission work is hard. Ministry is hard. Yet, by faith we go. By faith we obey the call of Jesus to make disciples of all nations. By faith, we press on through ministry awaiting the reward.
 - c. All of this is temporary and that makes these things a priority in this short life. Jesus is coming again. We should live our lives in light of that massive reality.
- II. Main Point
 - a. God's people went and proclaimed the word of God's grace in the midst of a dark and hostile world
- III. Outline
 - a. The pattern—Going and Proclaiming and Believing
 - b. The pattern—Disobeying and Division and Destroying
 - c. The pattern—They CONTINUED to preach the Good News
- IV. Exposition
 - a. Let's take a look at this pattern of going and proclaiming the word as usual.
 - i. If you recall a few weeks ago, we looked at Paul and Barnabus being sent out from the church in Antioch as messengers of the good news.
 - ii. They set sail for Cyprus and spent many days crossing that island speaking the word of God to whoever would listen. They encounter a sorcerer who contradicted the message but God struck him blind but a man of the proconsul believed!
 - iii. When they had reached the western side of the island, they set sail northwest to Perga on their way to Antioch Pisidia through the Taurus Mountains. Eventually, they were driven out of that region.
 - iv. They leave Antioch shaking the dust from their feet as a sign against them in the coming judgment.
 1. There are moments when one must move on. The city had heard the gospel. There are believers there now. The Light has been kindled. No doubt Paul and Barnabus poured into them in the time they had. But when the city drives Paul and Barnabus out of town, there remains many who have not heard.
 - v. In our text this morning, Paul and Barnabus have traveled some 90 to 100 miles southeast to Iconium. Again, this is no small journey. But God is faithful to provide, protect and lead them in what he has sent them to do.
 1. They were not like Israel when they were delivered from slavery in Egypt. To think that God would actively come and free his people and then let them die in the wilderness is a grievous offense.
 2. The same is true here. God called and sent Paul and Barnabus. Their journey takes them through the wilderness but you do not hear stories about them complaining and murmuring against God. All we hear is they traveled from one destination to another.
 3. The text begins with "And it happened." Why did they go in the direction of Iconium? It could be they had planned to go there next. Or it could have happened that the officials drove them out of town that direction. It could have been both.
 - a. At this point, everywhere they look—north, south, east or west—is in need of the gospel.
 - b. What they do seem to have planned is—keep going, keep proclaiming the gospel, go where there are Jewish synagogues and major cities in the region.

- c. This first verse goes like this: And it happened in Iconium after the same manner to enter them into the synagogue of the Jews and to speak in such a way that whoever might believe!
 - i. In the midst of going and proclaiming in the same manner, they enter the synagogue that didn't go so well the last time.
 - 1. We have a tendency to shrink back from the hard things. The enemy would rather they waste their efforts in the wrong places...the easy places.
 - 2. The enemy wants to silence Paul and Barnabus and every person who shares the word of God.
 - a. Just know, where you hear an attempt to silence the word the enemy is behind it every time.
 - 3. The greatest need these people in Iconium and all the world have is the to hear the word of God. They need to know how God can save them from eternal damnation. They need to know the hope of the gospel for their sins. They need life breathed into them. They are dead in their sins but that God is merciful.
 - 4. Yet, God loved the world by sending his Son that whoever believes will not perish but will have eternal life.
 - 5. This word comes to them through Paul and Barnabus from God. They walk in darkness and the light has come.
 - ii. What is the result of these messengers of the gospel going back to a Jewish synagogue speaking the same word of God that got them driven out of the last town?
 - 1. What happened? A great number of both Jews and Greeks believed!
 - 2. It doesn't happen any other way. Faith comes by hearing the word of Christ!
- 4. What does that mean for us?
 - a. As we are going, we should be looking for opportunities to share the gospel that others might believe and escape the eternal wrath of God.
 - b. We should be giving to the sending groups that we support: IMB, NAMB, and State level too.
 - c. We should be able and willing to send those among us who would like to go too.
 - d. We should pray for all of these things regularly.
- b. While a great number believed, there were also those who disbelieved. Everywhere the pattern of going and proclaiming of the gospel goes, so too the pattern of disobeying, division and destroying.
 - i. On the initial engagement with the gospel of Jesus Christ in the Jewish synagogue, many Jews and Greeks believe BUT others were disobedient. The darkness hates the light!
 - 1. The message of the gospel demands a response. It is commanded that we turn from our sins and call upon the name of the Lord for forgiveness. The gospel demands that we lay down our idols and take up our cross and follow Jesus. To disobey these commands is not to believe.
 - a. Jesus said in (Lk. 9:22-23) "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." ²³ And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

- i. This call is not just for the Twelve disciples. He said, “if anyone comes after me...”
 - ii. Deny yourself!
 - iii. Take up your cross DAILY...not a one-time event
 - iv. And follow Jesus
 - 2. In v. 2 these Jews are unbelieving. They did not want to take up their cross and follow Jesus. They disobeyed. Here’s what that looked like in Joshua where the same word is used.
 - a. (Jos. 5:6) For the people of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, the men of war who came out of Egypt, perished, **because they did not obey** the voice of the LORD; the LORD swore to them that he would not let them see the land that the LORD had sworn to their fathers to give to us, a land flowing with milk and honey.
 - b. (Jn. 3:36) ³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.
- ii. The unbelieving Jews were not neutral or indifferent. Unbelief produces evil works.
 - 1. Notice, they take action. The disobedient Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.
 - a. The image is striking. It’s like these people are asleep to what is going on and these people woke them up.
 - b. Add to the pot, the poisoning of their minds and you now have a dangerous situation.
 - i. This word “poisoning” most often means to harm someone physically. In this context, the unbelievers are trying to harm how they think.
 - ii. The toxic drink is taken in as they listen to the words of those disbelieving Jews—darkness.
 - iii. It reminds me of the passage I just quoted from in Numbers, when the ten spies poisoned the minds of the people to keep them from crossing the Jordan or was it to keep them from trusting the Lord. Both!
 - 1. They didn’t trust so they didn’t obey.
 - c. By way of application for us, we must know that our minds can be influenced. The enemy is still actively trying to stop the proclamation of the word of God.
 - i. When you are deceived, you do not know that you are deceived.
 - ii. We need to take every thought captive and shine the light of Scripture on it to see what is true. The Bible is our authority for knowing what is the truth is.
 - iii. Additionally, we need people who can be “cupbearers” for us. They know the Word of God and will help us know if there’s poison in those words.
- iii. This stirring up of the Gentile and poisoning their minds all started when Paul and Barnabus came and proclaimed the living word of God!
 - 1. How should Paul and Barnabus respond? Well, it says in (Acts 14:3) ³ So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.
 - a. They stayed. They are men who take up their cross daily. They are not seeking to save themselves. They go back to the synagogue. They do not leave when the Gentiles are roused up against all the believers.
 - b. Who will disciple these new believers if they leave?

- c. They must leave the light behind. They must prepare these new born babes with the Word.
- d. They hang in there, it says, for a considerable amount of time.
- e. Hear that. When things got hard, they stayed. This is what love does. (1 Cor. 13:7) ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
 - i. What happens if they leave immediately?
 - 1. Well, from how they respond and how God responds, it seems a prompt departure would have been evidence *against* the gospel.
 - 2. It would say it wasn't worth suffering for. It would say that those in opposition were unreachable. These people still need Jesus. What kind of message would it send to the new believers? If they had immediately left, they might have abandoned the faith and sided with what appeared stronger.
- 2. But by faith, they didn't leave. Their staying said something about the gospel. Paul and Barnabus speak boldly for the Lord and the Lord bore witness to the word of his grace.
 - a. This doesn't allow the false idea that God isn't real to go unchallenged or that faith and repentance isn't serious and urgent.
 - b. Actions say a lot about what you believe.
 - c. Paul and Barnabus stay *and* speak even when a crowd is against them.
 - d. Not only does Paul and Barnabus stay but God is there.
 - i. He bore witness through signs and wonders by the hands of Paul and Barnabus.
 - ii. These things happen in conjunction with the them staying and speaking the word boldly.
- iv. But messengers who stay while God does signs and wonders through them are not an automatic fix to the disobedient mob.
 - 1. Notice there in (Acts 14:4) ⁴ But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles.
 - a. A clear line is draw for which sides are taken. A schism has occurred.
 - b. The word of God's grace brought about division in this city.
 - i. Indeed, Jesus promised this would happen. He asked this question and then made this statement: (Lk. 12:51-53) ⁵¹ Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. ⁵² For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. ⁵³ They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."
 - ii. This is the pattern we have seen since the beginning of Acts.
 - 1. No one likes division and that can be a real challenge that's difficult to navigate.
 - 2. But what's at stake? Faith comes by hearing to word of Christ. They must hear in order to believe.
 - 3. The world doesn't believe the way you do and they need Jesus.

4. And God doesn't call us to something for which he doesn't provide the resources to do it and he is the One who saves. We are the messenger of the gospel.
 5. God has called us to make disciples and he promises to be with us.
 6. I suspect this is challenging your faith. Maybe some of you are unsure of your faith when hear these demands to take up your cross and follow Jesus. As we will hear two weeks from now, Paul and Barnabus will return to Iconium to strengthen the disciples there and Paul, (Acts 14:22) encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.
2. The division turned violent
 - a. An attempt...just an attempt...was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with the rulers, to mistreat and to stone them.
 - b. Yes...the word of God's grace does this: (2 Cor. 2:14-17) ¹⁴ But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. ¹⁵ For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, ¹⁶ to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? ¹⁷ For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.
 - c. It is a supernatural work of God's grace to be like this. One major shift in our mind is that we were lost and headed to eternal judgment but Jesus Christ came into the world to save a sinner like me. And now I want everyone to know where to find forgiveness before it is too late.
 - c. The final point is this...and it must be this: they continued to preach the gospel
 - i. By God's providence, Paul and Barnabus learn of the assault they have planned and they flee.
 1. This doesn't say that God is weak. It says there are many more that need to hear the gospel.
 2. A firm testimony of the God's word has been made for some time. God displayed signs and wonders by the hands of these messengers.
 3. The lives of Paul and Barnabus bear witness that they are not of afraid of suffering and death.
 4. But there are times when they must move on for the greater good.
 5. The persecution spreads the gospel to Lystra and Derbe pushing them further east towards the church in Antioch from where they were sent out.
 6. But as we will see, they will end up retracing their steps through all the places they have been to strengthen the disciples and set sail from Perga.
 7. Wow. The gospel continued to spread even with these sure patterns of persecution.
 - ii. "Someone asked, Will the heathen who have never heard the Gospel be saved? It is more a question with me whether we — who have the Gospel and fail to give it to those who have not — can be saved." — **Charles H. Spurgeon**

V. Response

- a. Expect these patterns as you take up your cross daily and follow Jesus...obey Jesus who is our Savior and Lord! He is our Shepherd. He is the Head of his church. And he commands us to go make disciples. We are witness of the word of his grace and the darkness doesn't like it.