

34—Acts 14.19-28—Missionaries Made of Clay

I. Introduction

- a. God has chosen to use people—jars of clay—to accomplish the task of making the gospel known in our community and throughout the world. As the pottery market was getting set up yesterday, I heard something made of clay break which tells you just how fragile and weak it is.
- b. Why would God use such fragile things like us to do such important things? The clearest answer is that God might be glorified—seen as glorious—through our weaknesses. The world should notice that God is using a very inadequate tool made of clay on a task that is too big for them and they should ask...how do you do that? To which the clay pot points to the Lord Jesus Christ!
- c. If we were adequate for the task, we would make a name for ourselves. That's why we are just clay pots!
- d. We are looking a couple of jars of clay today. (2 Cor. 4:7) ⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

II. Main Point

- a. All the work God had done with Paul and Barnabus

III. Outline

- a. The fickle Crowds
- b. The Steadfast Mission of God
- c. The Clay Missionaries

IV. Exposition

- a. As we break into this next part of the story, we discover a very fickle crowd that was ready to worship Paul and Barnabus but now have been persuaded to stone them instead.
 - i. This is not legal action. This is a lynching.
 - ii. But apart from the legality of this action, how in the world do people move from near worship to murder so easily and so quickly?
 1. The first thing is the Jews went to them. I know it's very simple but it's true. These people would not have done this had not the Jews come and persuaded them.
 2. You might say...well if Paul and Barnabus would have just minded their own business and never said a word the Jews would not have even been there.
 - a. But does one believe and be saved from the coming judgment if they do not hear the gospel? They can't and that's why God sent them.
 3. Whatever get rid of them meant, the crowds laid down their hymnals and picked up the nearest stone.
 - a. After a sufficient pounding, they drag Paul out of the city, thinking him to be dead.
 - i. They didn't even bury him! His body would not have survived the night.
 4. Thankfully, Paul wasn't dead.
- b. Now, let's take a look at what God did with Paul and Barnabus
 - i. Jump down to verse 27. At this point they are back at the church from where God sent them out nearly two years later. Here's how they understand what happened: (Acts 14:27) and having come and gathered together the church, they reported all that God had done with them
 1. This is how we ought to understand it too. God is the builder and the apostles are the tools. This is God's work. God's plan. God's mission.
 - a. This brings us full circle. Back in Ch. 13 it read, (Acts 13:2) While [the church in Antioch] were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."
 - b. God is a sender.

- i. God sent his Son into the world to save sinners. At the end of Luke 4 Jesus said, (Lk. 4:43) "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose."
 - 1. He preaches the good news and is the good news!
- ii. God also sends the Holy Spirit
 - 1. In (Jn. 16:8) Jesus says, ⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment
 - 2. (Acts 1:1-2) ...all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.
 - 3. The mission of Jesus to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God continues with his disciples. (Acts 1:8) ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses
 - 4. As we will see more clearly in a moment, God's plan for the church is to proclaim the gospel, make disciples, and plant churches. Lone missionaries are not God's plan. God sends people from the church.
 - a. The church baptizes and teaches disciples that go and do the same. The church supports them financially and maintains spiritual accountability.
 - 5. The Holy Spirit calls Paul and Barnabus out from the church in Antioch for the work.
- ii. In verses 19-28, the first work God does with Paul and Barnabus is in verse 21—they preached the gospel and made many disciples.
 - 1. This is what Jesus was sent to do. This is what the Holy Spirit sent these apostles to do.
 - a. I know there are a lot things called mission work these days but we need to be careful what we label mission work.
 - i. Other works that you might simply call "loving your neighbor" are necessary but it's not mission work if it doesn't have sharing the gospel and making disciples as the main purpose and goal.
 - 1. Hospitals need to be built in places of need.
 - 2. Wells need to be dug.
 - 3. Food distribution will never end.
 - ii. These are the kinds of things that open doors to share the gospel.
 - 1. I recently heard of a story for a pastor in the UAE where a hospital had been started some 15 years ago by Christians was the reason the UAE government allowed property to be bought for the purpose of a building to meet in.
- iii. The second work shows up in verse 22 when they leave Derbe and retrace their steps strengthening the souls of the disciples.
 - 1. I recall on a mission trip to Mexico starting to consider this part of the work.
 - a. Our leader literally said, "I want drop a gospel bomb on this place. So go and share with as many people as possible."
 - i. As you can imagine, there were a lot of people who did not repent and believe in Jesus.

- ii. But several did. And I began to wonder if our efforts would have been more fruitful if we would have spent time teaching those who converted.
 - 2. But here's the deal, I think this part of mission work. It is like the three-legged stool analogy. It is a necessary leg to hold up the stool.
 - a. This is the pattern we see here and the other missionary journeys.
 - b. Which soil will these new professing believers be?
 - i. Will they abandon the faith or will they bear fruit?
 - ii. Believing the gospel isn't a mere past tense decision but a continuing to believe! We never get over our need of the gospel.
 - iii. Jesus says more than, "Come to me and I will give you rest."
 - 1. (Matt. 11:28-30) ²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, **for** I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ **For** my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."
 - 2. We are commanded not only to come but to take Jesus' yoke upon us AND learn from him.
 - c. The image we should have of strengthening is if you can imagine a building with little to no support under it.
 - i. The way you strengthen the building is by putting supports under it.
 - ii. Adding supports to the building makes it unshakeable.
 - iii. It's like the parable of the soils I mentioned earlier. (Mk. 4:17) ¹⁷ And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.
 - iv. I think this work is directly connected to the next work because the necessary part of God's work to strengthen the disciples needs a new community of fellow disciples to accomplish this task.
 - iv. That gets us to the next work God did with Paul and Barnabus: establishing churches.
 - 1. In verse (Acts 14:23) and having appointed to them elders in every church, having prayed with fastings, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.
 - a. The main idea here is these disciples are commended to the Lord. What does that mean?
 - i. It's (Acts 14:23) entrusted them to the protection of the Lord
 - 1. It's this image of setting them before God. It's like Paul and Barnabus gathered them up and took them to God and placed them in his very presence to be cared for.
 - b. Now, how did they do that? How are they entrusted to the Lord?
 - i. By appointing elders (plural) for them in every church (singular)
 - 1. When it said, entrusted THEM to the Lord, who are they? The church and the elders.
 - 2. But what are elders?
 - 3. Turn to Titus and look at (Tit. 1:5) ⁵ This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you
 - a. Of course, what follows are the qualifications for a pastor.

- b. And it seems very clear from scripture that an orderly church has more than one pastor. And historically, there is no way to argue against it. Having one pastor is a fairly new thing.
 - c. Let's look at (1 Tim. 3:1) The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.
 - i. Then the qualifications.
 - ii. Neither of these say qualifications of a pastor. One says elder and the overseer which is the word for bishop.
 - d. One more passage...in 1 Peter 5 we see elder, overseer and pastor as synonymous.
 - i. (1 Pet. 5:1-2) So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder ² shepherd (or pastor) the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight (or bishop...overseer)
 - ii. Baptist statesman Herschel Hobbs wrote, "Pastor—this is one of three titles referring to the same office. The other two are 'bishop' and 'elder.'"
 - e. Some will surely ask, is this Baptist?
 - i. BFM 1925—Its Scriptural officers are bishops, or elders, and deacons.
 - ii. BFM 1963—Its Scriptural officers are pastors and deacons.
 - iii. BFM 2000—Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons
 - iv. How about older than 1925? The 1689 Second London Baptist Confession and the first confessional document for Southern Baptists, the *Abstract of Principles* (1859).
 - v. Well, around the 70 AD, Luke wrote the book of Acts that said, (Acts 14:23) they had appointed elders for them in every church.
 - vi. Did they do this?
 - vii. (Acts 20:17) ¹⁷ Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.
2. Let's bring this together. Share the gospel. Those who respond are disciplined and strengthened in the faith in a local church with elders. And in doing so, they are entrusted to the Lord's care.
- a. Why can't we just do this on our own? That's a nonsensical question. It is the third leg of the stool. Failing to establish the local church is to disregard the mission of the church which is God's work. God says it's necessary.
 - b. Indeed, it seems very clear that Jesus cares for his bride, the church. If you abandon the church, you abandon the care of God.

- c. It is there by the normal means of grace that we are strengthened in fellowship with the brethren, prayers, and feasting the word of God through singing songs, hymns and spiritual songs and preaching.
 - d. Not to do these things is very dangerous for the soul.
 - e. This gathering is necessary for the strengthening of our souls. We want to be rooted deeply so that when difficult days come, we do not abandon the Lord.
- c. Now the last point. The clay messengers.
- i. I left this to the end because it's the hardest part. In fact, as I read through the text I wept with joy and sadness.
 - ii. Here's why. All of God's work that we've talked about so far was done with Paul and Barnabus.
 - 1. They are the tools. They are the messengers. They are the sent ones. They are the missionaries. They are the witnesses. And they are made of clay!
 - 2. Jesus is building his church. The tools he uses are faithful/clay disciples.
 - a. And in some ways, the work is dependent on the tool. God could do it himself but he has chosen to use the means of his own disciples to accomplish this task and all the resources necessary provided by God himself!
 - b. Please look with me at verse 19 where they stoned Paul and leave him for dead outside the city of Lystra.
 - i. Yet, in verse 20 he gets up and goes back to Lystra. Sleeps. Bandages his wounds. No doubt pleads with the Lord that he may continue to believe and follow Jesus...that he might give him strength as he reads the word.
 - ii. And notice, the next day he went on with Barnabus to Derbe.
 - 1. Stoned nearly to death yesterday. Walking some 60 miles to Derbe the next day to preach the gospel and make disciples.
 - 2. Indeed, he serves in the strength that God supplies. Later he will say in (2 Cor. 4:8-12) ⁸ We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you.
3. The main idea here is—he went on with Barnabus.
 - a. What he did when he got there was dependent on, he and Barnabus going to Derbe and they were dependent on the Lord!
 - b. You might wonder, if this is God's work and he sent them there then why does he not make it easy for them?
4. Let's see the rest of the examples here which will answer this question.
 - a. The next work of God was the strengthening of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith that through many tribulations WE must enter the Kingdom of God.
 - i. But guess what? This doesn't happen unless Paul and Barnabus RETURN to Lystra (where he was stoned) and to Iconium and to Antioch.
 - ii. Paul wasn't too far from his hometown of Tarsus when he was in Derbe but instead of going home, he and Barnabus backtrack to entrust those new believers to God by strengthening them and establishing churches.

- b. They went. They returned. They commended. They came. They went down. They sailed. They fulfilled the work that God had sent them to do.
 - c. Now the report...not what they did but what God did with them, and how GOD had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles!
 - d. And they remained...remained no little time with the disciple.
 - iii. What would make someone do that? This is illogical. How do you preach the gospel to people while you're bleeding and bruised? Will they not want to know what happened? How do you go back to those places that tried to kill you?
 - 1. The answer must be the love of Christ which transformed Paul from a terrorist to a missionary.
 - a. The same must be true of us. We must be transformed by beauty and love of Christ.
 - b. True, we are not all at the same point Paul was, but we're being changed from one degree of glory to another.

V. Response

- a. I want us to be a people who wants to do all three of the works of God that we've seen here. We as a church have some changes to make. We all need to change too.
- b. We simply will not reach people without personal sacrifice and commitment. If Paul being nearly stoned to death can get up and go back to that city and then walk 60 miles to the next city to share the gospel surely, we all can in the power the Holy Spirit, love our neighbors and tell them about Jesus.