

0297

Galatians in Acts, part 2

Acts 14:1-28

Sunday, August 28, 2022

Text

Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. ² But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. 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. ⁴ But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. ⁵ When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, ⁶ they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, ⁷ and there they continued to preach the gospel.

⁸ Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. ⁹ He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, ¹⁰ said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking. ¹¹ And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" ¹² Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. ¹³ And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. ¹⁴ But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, ¹⁵ "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. ¹⁶ In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. ¹⁷ Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." ¹⁸ Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

¹⁹ But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. ²⁰ But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. ²¹ When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. ²³ And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

²⁴ Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. ²⁵ And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, ²⁶ and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. ²⁷ And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. ²⁸ And they remained no little time with the disciples.

Prayer

Introduction

So in last week's passage, we saw that Paul came into Antioch, which was a town in the Roman province of Galatia.

And a common tactic that Paul used when traveling to a new town was that he would go to the synagogue and preach to the Jewish people.

It was a logical starting place for someone like Paul who had been Jewish and converted to Christianity.

He understood Jewish customs, culture, and beliefs.

And so that's where we began last week. Paul was invited to speak at the synagogue and began with familiar Old Testament passages. He talked about the Exodus and the Israelite monarchy but he eventually would tie that to Jesus, as the promised Son of David.

Now I didn't really talk about this at the time but it's something that's relevant to last week's passage and again in today's passage and that is this dichotomy between Jews and gentiles.

By the way, a gentile is anyone who is not Jewish. So probably just about everyone, if not everyone, in this room. So thank God for the gospel being spread to the Gentiles too.

Sometimes the New Testament will also use the word "Greek" as being synonymous with the Gentile world. The gospel went forth from a Greco-Roman world and so in a sense, you had Jews and you had pagan Greco-Romans.

The Jews were God's chosen people. Jesus was Jewish. His ministry largely took place and was directed towards Jewish people. But there are also glimpses we see in the gospels of that message being for the whole world.

It was first proclaimed to the Jews and then to the Gentile world.

The earliest converts to Christianity were Jewish people. And the reason I'm bringing this up and the reason why it matters is because it's pointing to the worldwide mission of the gospel.

In last week's passage, Paul began in a synagogue. Basically a Jewish church service.

But we also see Gentiles responding to the gospel.

For just a moment, I want to revisit a section towards the end of chapter 13 where we were last week. We didn't get much time to really talk about this.

Chapter 13, Verses 44-45:

⁴⁴ The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him.

So you have the gospel being preached to Jewish people and some of them are actively working against Paul.

Acts 13:46-47:

⁴⁶ And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you.

Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For so the Lord has commanded us, saying,

**" 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.' "**

And we'll see a similar pattern in chapter 14, where Paul first preaches the gospel to Jewish people and after being rejected, preaches it to the Gentiles.

And again, this points to the worldwide focus of the gospel. Jesus came into the world as the promised savior of Israel but that message of salvation was meant for the whole world.

It appears in Paul's ministry that, even though he had been a prominent Jewish pharisee, that he primarily, ultimately saw himself as a preacher to the Gentiles.

In Romans 11:13, Paul says:

I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles

Paul would also reflect on this when he wrote his letter to the Galatians. Galatians 1:15-16, Paul says:

¹⁵ But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ¹⁶ was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles

Back in Acts.

At the end of chapter 13, among the opposition, we see Paul and Barnabas departing from Antioch. Chapter 13:51 said that they fled to Iconium, which was another city in Galatia, and about 90 miles away. They preached first to the Jews, then to the Gentiles.

Some responded in faith, others did not.

With that, we come to chapter 14 and begin with Paul now arriving in Iconium. And we'll look at our passage today in three scenes.

First scene - preaching the gospel

Verse 1:

Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed.'

I've already been talking about this, and similarly to where we began last week, we see Paul begin his strategy by starting in the synagogue.

The text says **a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed.**

Just as last week, we see the gospel bearing fruit. People responding to the message of salvation. That text says Jews and Greeks believed.

But in another similarity to last week, there were also those who opposed the message.

Verse 2:

² But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.

But that little bit of opposition doesn't stop Paul and Barnabas from sharing the gospel.

Verse 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.

They're spreading the gospel and we see the Lord blessing their ministry with signs and wonders. We'll have more on that subject in just a moment.

Verses 4-5:

⁴ But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. ⁵ When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them,

We see the heat getting turned up on Paul and Barnabas. It's the second city in Galatia that we see them driven out of.

Verses 6-7:

⁶ they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, ⁷ and there they continued to preach the gospel.

And so they move on. Just as they did at the end of our passage last week. They had gone from Antioch to Iconium. Now they go from Iconium to Lystra.

Signs and wonders

Now a moment ago, the passage mentioned that while they were ministering in Iconium, they had done signs and wonders. I wanted to talk about that for a couple moments.

Signs and wonders are something we see in numerous places in the Book of Acts. It's not even the final time we'll see them in this passage. Some churches today still make a big emphasis on signs and wonders. On the miraculous.

I've seen videos online of so-called pastors personally performing miracles.

A lot of times, they seem more like second-rate magic tricks.

In the Bible itself, miracles are not a constant. They tend to be concentrated in three periods of history.

During the ministry of Moses when the Lord was leading the Israelites out of Egypt and leading them through the wilderness and bringing them to the Promised Land.

We see them later in Israel's history during the ministries of Elijah and Elisha.

And then we see them certainly during the ministry of Jesus and into the apostolic age.

Does God still work in miraculous ways today?

Let's get the most obvious statement out of the way. Obviously, God is able to. God is almighty. We talked about miracles last spring. I think that there are still times when God acts supernaturally in the world.

But it's not the common way he interacts with his world.

I think that for churches who have an expectation of seeing signs and wonders, that it's misguided.

While God can do signs and wonders, God also acts through his people. Signs were utilized during the ministry of Jesus to point to deeper realities about who he is, to fulfill prophecies from the Old Testament, and to display his power and glory.

Signs and wonders in the early church confirmed that the apostles were continuing that work of Jesus in the world and acting with divine authority. They were also coming at a time when Christianity was new. There are a billion Christians today.

God can act through signs and wonders, but the more ordinary means by which the Lord engages in the world is through his Church and through his people being the hands and feet of Christ in the world.

Again, miracles do happen.

Raise your hand if you think you've ever witnessed something miraculous.

But they're the exception, not the rule. You might see or experience something miraculous in your life. But that might also be once, a couple times? Over the course of decades of life.

Now just because we aren't constantly being dazzled with miraculous signs does not mean that God is any less at work. Every believer in the gospel today has been endowed with God's Holy Spirit. We have God's Word, his scripture. We have a fuller picture of God's redemptive plan, because of Christ.

I know it's so often a temptation to look at signs and wonders in the Bible and think "I wish we had that! It'd be so much easier to believe!"

But we so rarely, if ever, fully embrace all of the many tools at our disposal to truly know God. His Word, his Spirit, his Church, and his gospel.

Sure, lots of Christians read the Bible and pray. But do we always do it with a hunger and desperation to know God? Because if we're not careful, it can easily become something we do, just to check that box for the day. God is good and can still bless that,

but do you see the difference? Is the Word a treasure to you? Is it the sweetness of honey to you as the Psalmist compares it?
Or is it just some nice stories and moral lessons?

How you view the Bible matters.

The same goes with prayer. That it is an opportunity to commune and spend time with the Almighty. But for so many, we view it as an Amazon wish list.

Yes, we go to church. But how do you truly view that? Again, my point isn't to make accusations but we live in a society where saying you're a Christian costs very little and where being a nominal Christian is very easy.

It can be very easy to go to church to see some friends, hear some songs, hear a sermon that will hopefully be tolerable or entertaining or practical. But the Church itself is a tool that God has given us both for making disciples and for being shaped and conformed in the fellowship of other believers. Like knives sharpening knives.

And then there's the gospel itself. The message that we were dead in sin but that we have the promise of eternal life through Christ.

What is that to you?

Is the gospel the oxygen supply to a world without air? Is it your water in a desert of sin? Is it your light in a world of darkness? Or is it something you just say "Sure, I'll have that" but that doesn't change how you see everything else in your life?

We have the tools we need to more deeply know and follow God already. The challenge is that we so often don't truly use them.

Loving the Lord with all of our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength.

Second scene - a hostile response

Paul and Barnabas move on and we'll move with them into verse 8.

It's another example of signs and wonders as Paul encounters a man who could not walk and the man is miraculously healed.

Verses 8-10:

⁸ Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. ⁹ He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, ¹⁰ said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking.

It's incredible. This man can now walk.

And we see the response of the crowd. And it's another reason why signs and wonders are not always what they're cracked up to be.

Verse 11:

¹¹ And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!”

The people misinterpret the sign!

The purpose of the sign was meant to point people to God but instead, they want to venerate Paul and Barnabas. The people of Lystra think that Paul and Barnabas are Greek gods.

Verses 12-13:

¹² Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. ¹³ And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.

The situation is getting out of hand. Zeus was the chief of the Greek gods, Heremes was the messenger god, and that's who the people think Paul and Barnabas are.

Verse 14, we see the response of Paul and Barnabas. How would you respond if someone worshiped you as a god?

¹⁴ But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out

They don't think it's funny. They don't think it's cute. They don't think it's amusing.

They are horrified.

What the people think is blasphemous and Paul and Barnabas want no part.

Now we saw last week where Paul was ministering to a Jewish audience and utilized the Old Testament to point to Jesus.

Evangelizing the pagan

But here, he's before a pagan, Greco-Roman audience in Lystra. They won't understand any of the Old Testament theology and references. So instead, he will point the crowd towards a living and transcendent God.

I think I. Howard Marshall is helpful in framing it as Paul basically has to begin with this audience a step back from where he could start with a Jewish audience¹.

And again, that's another important reminder in our sharing of the gospel with others. That we must begin with where they are. Yes, we probably aren't going to interact with Greco-Roman polytheists, but we do meet and engage with people who have different levels of Biblical knowledge, different levels of familiarity with the church or lack thereof. People are not all the same.

Verse 15:

¹⁵ “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.

Again, instead of assuming that the audience has a Judaic worldview, he begins with where his audience is. They might not know the scriptures, and so Paul instead points to the natural world. To the God who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them.

Paul and Barnabas came to Lystra as ordinary men who had an extraordinary message of a loving and redemptive God. As Paul says, they came bringing them good news.

And that good news is the gospel of salvation.

Verse:

¹⁶ In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways.

While the Lord allowed for a world where the nations could go their own way, God has also revealed himself through his creation.

Verse 17:

¹⁷ Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.”

It's quite possible that Paul says even more here. But this is all that is recorded in this encounter in the Book of Acts.

He's trying to ultimately point people towards the gospel.

How do they respond? Verse 18:

¹ I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 252.

¹⁸ Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

In one ear, out the other. They might have heard but they didn't listen.

He tried.

Again, there isn't always fruitfulness in ministry and in evangelism. I appreciate that a story like this is recorded in the Book of Acts. Because you see a lot of stories in Acts where you have people coming to the Lord in droves.

It's not the case here. It was not all unbridled success and victory.

The people want to keep on making their pagan sacrifices.

Now in verse 19, the tone changes and we see Paul's opposition from his previous two stops has tracked him and Barnabas down.

¹⁹ But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.

Paul had tried to preach the gospel, but here, we see that the crowd was easily stirred up into an angry mob.

I feel like it gets mentioned almost in passing but this is very serious. Paul is so badly attacked that the people thought they had killed him.

David Peterson points out that you have Paul's opposition travel over 100 miles in the first century. It's not like they hopped in a car and drove for a couple hours. They had to go on a journey to go to Lystra². Why?

Is it because they want to convince this pagan audience of the truth of the God of the Old Testament? No. They want to rile them up against Paul.

What are we for?

It can be so easy to become known more by what we're against than what we're for.

I'm not saying that we should shrink back from what we believe. Because there are obviously things we're against.

² David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 411.

I'm against the devil.
I'm against murder and killing. That includes being against killing the unborn.
I'm against lying.

Just to give a few examples.

And we should oppose that which is sinful and that which is wrong. But what are we for?
We are for Jesus, we are for the gospel, we are for holiness, we are for virtue, we are for discipleship.

The Jewish group who came all the way to Lystra not to build up but to take down. Not to share a message of life but to advocate for death.

Ask yourself. For those who know you: do most of your views, opinions, things you speak up about reflect what you're against rather than what you're for?
Because to share the good news of the gospel is to be for something. It's to be for the forgiveness and for the life that Jesus invites us into.

Third scene

We come to our third scene.

Where we last saw Paul, he had been left for dead outside the city.

That's quite the cost to share the good news.

Verse 20:

²⁰ But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.

They just go on to the next town.

I'll change my walking route if someone's dog scares me. Paul was hit with stones within an inch of his life and he's on to the next place.

Verses 21-23:

²¹ When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. ²³ And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

The text says that had made many disciples. They're having more success in Derbe.

The verse mentions that they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. And if you've paid attention to the locations the last couple of weeks, what that means is that Paul is going back in reverse by the same route that he had traveled.

Why did Paul go that route? He didn't have to. There were other routes but he intentionally went back the route that he came so that he could reconnect with the cities he had already visited.

He did it, as the text says, to strengthen the souls of the disciples and to encourage them in their faith.

And that means even returning to cities where people were trying to have him and Barnabas killed.

Making disciples

Disciple making is a process.

I think we often put a huge emphasis on the moment of conversion. And that's obviously important. But a baby Christian cannot survive alone. Just like a baby person needs people to tend to him or her, to take care of him or her. New Christians need to be nurtured and guided by those who are more mature in the faith.

Paul was not able to personally disciple every new convert but we also see him installing elders in the churches, entrusted with the Spiritual care and leadership of these newly formed Galatian churches.

Verses 24-26:

²⁴ Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. ²⁵ And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, ²⁶ and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled.

By the way, Antioch gets mentioned twice. It's because there was more than one Roman city called Antioch, just like there's more than one Springfield.

I know we've covered a lot but it's a wide ranging passage. And chapters 13 and 14 are all just Paul's first missionary journey.

We saw various stops that he made. We saw Paul and Barnabas ministering in different locations. We saw them sharing the gospel with people of different faiths: Jews and pagan Greeks. We saw some who received the message, some who didn't, and we saw an angry mob attempt to kill Paul by stoning.

It was a whirlwind trek through Galatia.

But I love these last two verses:

**²⁷ And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.
²⁸ And they remained no little time with the disciples.**

Paul almost died.

And his focus is on people finding life through Christ.

All that God had done with them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

That's where the focus is. Not, "Oh, this was so hard." It's not making much of Paul and Barnabas. It's making much of the gospel.

Conclusion

Again, consider what Paul did. Traveling in first century Rome. Meeting all sorts of different people. Life in danger. Receptiveness and opposition.

I'm not saying that needs to be us.

Paul was like a Navy SEAL. We don't all need to be Navy SEALs.

He did the maximum.

But when it comes to sharing the good news of the gospel, so many Christians don't even do anything.

My point today isn't that we need to go out there and be Paul.

But we all have people around us who we can reach. We have people around us who don't know Jesus. And so I'll point us back to the first step, which is to pray. Pray for specific people who don't know Jesus in your life. Pray for them to know to come to faith, pray for opportunities to have gospel conversations.