

We have been following the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas. At Antioch Pisidia, they were driven out of town by the prominent town leaders who sympathized with the synagogue. But they left behind disciples who were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. They went from Antioch further east and down the mountain to Iconium. I grew up pronouncing these cities a certain way, but I'll try in the coming sermons to pronounce them as they sound in Greek.

*<sup>1</sup> 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.* Acts 14:1 Paul and Barnabas had a rough start. Luke reports only one Roman official on the whole island of Cyprus became a believer. Then Paul became ill, but had success in Antioch Pisidia only to then be driven out of town. Our passage today has them in Iconium, which is in Galatia but with a different culture than Antioch. A great number of Jews and Greeks put their faith in Jesus. How encouraging that must have been to finally see fruit!

The verse says it was the result of how they spoke. This suggests it was the words that were chosen and the way they were delivered. One of Paul's letters requested that people pray that words will be given him so he will clearly make known the mystery of the gospel (Ephesians 6:19). Jesus said that the Father taught Him not only what to say but how to say it (John 12:49). We tend to be respond to events without praying first. Remember when Jesus was confronted with a decision about an adulteress woman, he stooped down and wrote on the ground. He didn't fire back an answer until He heard from the Father. Then His answer came with the right words that were said in the right way. The results were conviction of the Holy Spirit, grace for the woman, and an example for us all (John 8:6-7). I ask for you to pray for me that I might be given God's words for each sermon and be shown how He wants them delivered. We all need that when sharing with others. If the words are to have a lasting impact, they need to come from the Holy Spirit. He knows what will penetrate the heart.

The answer as to "how to speak" often comes in the form of a question that causes the person to think. Consider Jesus' questions. "Who was a neighbor to the Samaritan?" (Luke 10:36) "What man who has a hundred sheep will not leave the ninety-nine and go and search for the lost one?" (Matthew 18:12) In the story of the adulteress, He asked, "Where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you?" (John 8:10) His questions make us think; questions like, "Which of you convinces me of sin?" (John 8:46) "Who do men say that I am?" (Mark 16:15) Questions are a way to penetrate the defenses and cause the person to consider what they truly believe. It was a tool of rabbis, and Jesus used it when He debated teachers of the law. He asked them, "What should be done to the men who rented the vineyard?" (Matthew 21:40) May God grant us the discernment and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit that we would know to speak in such a way that many would come to faith in Jesus.

*<sup>2</sup> But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.* (Acts 14:2) The Jews who did not receive the gospel planted criticisms in the

**Commented [PW1]: Ephesians 6:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,

**Commented [PW2]: John 12:49 (ESV)**

<sup>49</sup> For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. Also see NIV translation

**Commented [PW3]: John 8:6-7 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.

<sup>7</sup> And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her."

**Commented [PW4]: Luke 10:36 (ESV)**

<sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"

**Commented [PW5]: Matthew 18:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?

**Commented [PW6]: John 8:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

**Commented [PW7]: John 8:46 (ESV)**

<sup>46</sup> Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?

**Commented [PW8]: Matthew 16:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

**Commented [PW9]: Matthew 21:40 (ESV)**

<sup>40</sup> When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

minds of the Gentile God fearers. The unbelieving Jews didn't want any more of their potential converts to accept the gospel and turn away from the synagogue. We see hints of what that poison may have been in Paul's letters and the next chapter. It may have included the idea that God expects us to obey the law to be saved. They might have slandered grace as a means to continue to sin without remorse (Romans 6:1-2). Whatever poisonous ideas they used, it slowed down the number of Gentile converts.

<sup>3</sup> *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.* Acts 14:3 Where sin abounds, grace much more abounds (Romans 5:20). Despite the opposition, Paul and Barnabas were able to remain much longer than they did at Antioch. The Lord confirmed the word of his grace with signs and wonders that were done by Paul and Barnabas. God knew those Gentiles whose minds were poisoned needed confirmation that what Paul and Barnabas were teaching was from God. When hearts are open to the truth, God will go to great lengths to bring them out of darkness and into the light of the gospel (John 1:9). He gives dreams and visions to those who are truly seeking. He connects them with people who can give them the answers from Scripture. I've heard so many amazing testimonies of what God has done to help people who are seeking the truth to come to accept Jesus as Lord.

Let me share one I just read this morning. Spirit of Martyrdom reported on one of the men that took the evangelism course in India. As a young boy his father made him worship Hindu gods. At five years old he was forced to be rented out as a boy servant. They made him work like an adult. His father was a violent man and his mother would take the family out of the house when he was enraged. In his teens, he began to drink and hang out with the bad boys. One day he saw Christians in the streets of his town telling about Jesus. His father came out and beat one of them. The man responded with kindness. He sought out the man and wanted to know how he could be like that.

Back at home he felt he had to worship the true God, the creator and could no longer bow before the Hindu gods. He would go up on his roof and pray. Being illiterate, he asked for the ability to read so he could read the Bible. He said, "God told me He would read to me. You call unto me and I will do great and mighty things." He heard Scripture from the Bible. His father caught him praying one night and beat him. He left home and found refuge with a Christian. His father found him and made him choose between his home or Jesus. The young man, now twenty-years-old, chose Jesus. He found that after a few months he was starting to be able to read. He joined the evangelism school and now has a vision to reach seven villages, six of which have never heard the gospel.

Even after the signs and wonders in Iconium we read, <sup>4</sup> *But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles.* Acts 14:4 No matter how much proof is given, Jesus will always cause a division among people (John 7:43). It means the Word has been effective in convicting hearts. That either causes repentance or rebellion. And when there is rebellion, persecution of God's instruments usually follows. That's because the gospel does claim to be exclusive truth, which by that very fact condemns all other ways to God whether religion or works. Jesus is the

**Commented [PW10]: Romans 6:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

<sup>2</sup> By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

**Commented [PW11]: Romans 5:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

**Commented [PW12]: John 1:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

**Commented [PW13]: John 7:43 (ESV)**

<sup>43</sup> So there was a division among the people over him.

only way to God or He isn't. His Word is truth or it isn't. There is no gray area when it comes to salvation through Jesus. That causes division, a division that is already existent, to become more pronounced.

*<sup>5</sup> When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them,* Acts 14:5 The opposition to the gospel became united and they decided to make it physical. If lying about Paul and Barnabas was not effective enough to stop people from believing the gospel, they would shut them up by force. That has never worked. It never will. It silences the weak, but emboldens the strong. Where persecution abounds the church grows numerically and becomes purer. Paul and Barnabas had planted a church and will return to strengthen it.

*<sup>6</sup> they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country,* Acts 14:6 The grace of God made it possible for them to learn of the plan to stone them, so they moved on further east, <sup>7</sup> *and there they continued to preach the gospel.* Acts 14:7

*<sup>8</sup> Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. <sup>9</sup> He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, <sup>10</sup> said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking.* Acts 13:8-10 There are two things in play. Paul had the discernment that the man had faith to be healed. That discernment is the gift of God (Philippians 1:9). Secondly, the man had faith in what Paul was preaching. I've spoken before about all that would have to take place for a miracle like this to occur. It is impossible in the natural realm. The man had never walked. His muscles had never developed. The nervous system did not relay the signals to the proper muscles at all, let alone in the proper order of muscle pressure and resistance that makes standing possible. If a person was able to use their legs for the first time, it would take many long months of trial and error to develop the muscles and teach the brain to fire off signals in the right timing and manner to just begin to stand still on one's feet. This man sprang up and was instantly walking in a manner similar to the man whom John raised to his feet at the Golden Gate (Acts 3:6-8).

*<sup>11</sup> 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!"* Acts 14:11 Instead of connecting the miracle to what Paul was preaching, they associated it with their superstitions. Mythology had stories of gods who took the form of men to see if mankind deserved blessing or judgment.

*<sup>12</sup> Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.*

*<sup>13</sup> 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.* Acts 14:12-13 The local priest of Zeus ran out to greet Paul and Barnabas with garlands and animals to sacrifice to them, hoping for a blessing from the gods. The people were right in assuming that the miracle was divine, they just associated it with their traditions rather than the true God that Paul and Barnabas were declaring.

**Commented [PW14]: Philippians 1:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment,

**Commented [PW15]: Acts 3:6-8 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"

<sup>7</sup> And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong.

<sup>8</sup> And leaping up he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

*<sup>14</sup> But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, <sup>15</sup> "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. Acts 14:14-15* This was horrifying to the apostles. They knew the account of Herod being eaten by worms for not giving God the glory (Acts 12:23). They had come to turn people away from those false gods the crowd thought them to be. So they declared their message in an urgent abbreviated form. "We are just men like you. We came to tell you to stop believing in false gods and worship the one true Creator of all things."

**Commented [PW16]: Acts 12:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.

*<sup>16</sup> In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them. Acts 14:16-18* The message of Jesus had not been proclaimed in the past. However, God was still at work and revealing Himself through creation. He showed man His goodness by sending rain for crops and providing our needs which satisfies our hearts and makes us glad. Creation is the second gospel and it is proclaimed throughout the world. Paul would later write to the Romans that the invisible attributes of God can be seen through the things that God made (Romans 1:20). There is a testimony of God in creation so that man has no excuse not to believe in God. Even with this explanation they were barely able to stop the people from offering sacrifices to them.

**Commented [PW17]: Romans 1:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

*<sup>19</sup> 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. Acts 14:19* How quickly the crowd was turned by Jews who rejected the message in the previously evangelized cities. Because the crowd was so devoted to their mythology, it would have been easy to turn them even though they saw an unexplainable miracle. They stoned Paul, dragged him out of the city, and left him for dead.

Some commentators believe that this was when Paul saw his vision of the third heaven and heard things he was not allowed to share. They believe he had a near death experience. I've read a lot about this type of thing, in some cases the brain waves even cease and yet the person is restored to life. They return having seen other worldly things that they have a hard time describing. We can't be certain that this is what happened to Paul, but it sounds like it might have been.

What happened next seems to me to be just as miraculous.<sup>20</sup> *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. Acts 14:20* Can you visualize this? Paul is pummeled with rocks. Then his limp body is dragged outside the city gates to dispose of it. The disciples, who had followed Paul and Barnabas from the other cities gather around to pray over the body of Paul. Then Paul stands up bloody and bruised and says, "Let's go back into town." Whaaaaat? I'd have said, "Help me get out of here!" It wasn't until the following day they went on 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.* Acts 14:21-22 The Jewish antagonists must have gone home, thinking they had finished Paul off and were done with him. All we know about Derbe is that they were able to proclaim the gospel and make many disciples. That means they stayed for some time and made sure they were grounded in the faith. This is what Jesus told the disciples to do, to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19).

Make disciples of your family, your friends, and anyone willing to listen. You can start by just getting to know them. The opportunity will come to share your testimony. Ask if they want to set aside a time to study the Bible with you or invite them to a Bible study. You don't have to be a Bible scholar or know the answer to every question. Just read the Bible together and let it speak to you. Invite them to a Bible believing church. Before you know it you will have made disciples, and you probably won't even get stoned for doing so. It takes an investment of time and personal loving concern, but you'll gain more than you give and you'll be blessed in the process (Acts 20:35).

Paul and Barnabas returned the way they came and stopped in each city to strengthen the fledgling churches. They encouraged them to continue in the faith. That is something we should do to any one we influence to follow Jesus. Trials and trouble will come. We have to go through things in this fallen world. But God uses those hardships to strengthen our faith. Paul had just gone through some hardships. It may have been that in them God gave him the visions that helped him persevere through the rest of his ministry (2 Corinthians 12:2-4). It is in the trials of life that we learn the deepest lessons and sense the power and presence of God with us.

*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.* Acts 14:23 We've already seen in Acts that God's plan for the local church was equal and accountable elders in each church, not a single pastor (Acts 11:30; 13:1-2; Titus 1:5). They are shepherds over the flock and are under the Great Shepherd (1 Peter 5:1-2). Together they pray and seek God's leading for the congregation while feeding the flock the Word and caring for them. It was probably difficult to leave these new congregations behind. They fasted and prayed and committed each congregation to the Lord. They trusted the Great Shepherd to lead the local elders/pastors. That is what we should do when someone we disciple has to move on. When our children leave our home, it is the same. If we have poured out our heart to them and taught them the Word of God, so then we must trust God to lead them and mature them. Thank God for phones and email so that we can keep encouraging them to continue in the faith. That is often the outcome of a morning prayer time. I'm prompted to write someone to encourage them to persevere through a trial or to keep growing in the Lord (Hebrews 3:13).

*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*

**Commented [PW18]: Matthew 28:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

**Commented [PW19]: Acts 20:35 (ESV)**

<sup>35</sup> In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

**Commented [PW20]: 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows.

<sup>3</sup> And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—

<sup>4</sup> and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.

**Commented [PW21]: Acts 11:30 (ESV)**

<sup>30</sup> And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

**Commented [PW22]: Acts 13:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

<sup>2</sup> While they 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."

**Commented [PW23]: Titus 1:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> 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—

**Commented [PW24]: 1 Peter 5:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed:

<sup>2</sup> shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;

**Commented [PW25]: Hebrews 3:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

*Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled.* <sup>27</sup> *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.* <sup>28</sup> *And they remained no little time with the disciples.* Acts 14:24-28 Compared to all the action there was not much to report on the rest of the return trip. Sometimes our spiritual assignments have huge results and other times very little that is observable. Either way, the important thing is that we are faithful to do what God has asked (1 Corinthians 14:2). They reported to the church that sent them out all that God had done with them. Notice they didn't say what *they* had done. They recognized that the fruit was from God. The important thing in the report was that God was planting Gentile churches. They stayed in Antioch for some time recovering from the mission, and what a mission it was! It had highs and lows, from many converts in some towns, to none to speak of in others, from a Roman proconsul believing, to being stoned. The life of faith is an adventure. It's not easy, but you can't say it isn't exciting. Whether you are called to your family, neighbors, and co-workers, or to some distant mission field, the plan is the same. Follow God's leading. Share the gospel when you have the opportunity. Seek out people to disciple and encourage them to endure. This our mission. Love God and love your neighbors by sharing the love of Jesus.

**Commented [PW26]: 1 Corinthians 4:2 (ESV)**  
<sup>2</sup> Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.

#### Questions

- 1 How can we speak in such a way so that people come to faith?
- 2 How did the Jews slow down the number of Gentile conversions?
- 3 Why may God have granted signs and wonder in Iconium?
- 4 How amazing was the miracle at Lystra?
- 5 What was the abbreviated message declared there?
- 6 Why did they so quickly turn against the apostles?
- 7 What may have happened to Paul when he was stoned? Why?
- 8 Why are difficulties helpful to our spiritual growth?
- 9 What did the apostles do in Derbe?
- 10 How can we do the same?