**Acts and Us**

***Acts 13 – Willing, Obedient and Available***

Chapter 13 began with Paul’s first missionary journey, where he and Barnabas were set apart and sent out from Syrian Antioch in the Northeast Mediterranean, to sail west toward Cyprus and beyond.

Last Chapter ended with:

**Acts 13:** **49-52“**The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. But the Jewish leaders incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. So they shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and *went to Iconium*. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”

**Acts 14**

**Acts 14:1-7 “***At Iconium*Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively 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. **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.”

Upon reaching Iconium, they went *as they usually did in each town,* into the Jewish synagogue, speaking so effectively that both Jews and Greeks became believers. Here in Iconium, the Jews who did *not* believe “poisoned the minds” of the other *Gentiles.*

In other words, those who liked to consider themselves “religious”, aligned themselves with those in secular society, and *poisoned their minds* against those who were speaking the truth.

This is a pattern in the early missionary journeys of Paul and Barnabas. They spoke the truth boldly and effectively and many believed. Those who did not believe, aligned with those whom they considered “godless” (Herodians, Gentiles, Romans) and tried to silence and persecute those who were preaching the Word of God and speaking the truth.

*[ Sadly, this is happening in our current culture. If you were to speak the truth openly and boldly about topics and issues that are currently “hot topics” in society (abortion, marriage, sexuality, gender, creation, etc. ) you would get a lot of push back as you would expect, from people who openly disregard God and His Word.*

*But you would also likely come under attack from people who claim to be God-fearing, Bible-believers as well, who want to align themselves with secular society, (especially if you were to do it on social media, which I normally don’t advise.]*

In Iconium, these persecutors were actually forming a plan to stone the Apostles, but they found out about it and fled to the next city *(you’ll see later in this chapter however, that these same persecutors show up with the same diabolical plan again).*

They continued their journey and went to Lystra and Derbe. These are important cities because Lystra is the town where Paul eventually found Timothy, and both of these places are part of what later becomes the Galatian church (Galatians).

**8-10“**In Lystra there sat a man who was lame. He had been that way from birth and had never walked. **9**He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed **10**and called out, “Stand up on your feet!” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.”-

This is very similar to the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate in Jerusalem in Acts 3 at the hands of Peter. He didn’t pray for him, he just looked straight at him and told him to stand.

**Acts 3:4-8**“Peter looked straight at him, as did John…**6**Then Peter said…In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.”… instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. **8**He jumped to his feet and began to walk.”

When Paul did this, the crowd reacted in as very peculiar way. They didn’t persecute them initially; they didn’t turn to God right away. Instead they began to shout to each other that Paul and Barnabas were actually the Greek gods Zeus and Hermes who have come to their city, and they began to prepare to offer sacrifices to them.

**11-13“**When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!” **12**Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. **13**The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.”

I know that the apostles rejectedthese titles of Greek gods right away, but I wonder if Paul ever wondered why Barnabas got to be Zeus (the Father of all gods) and he was thought to be Hermes (The god of *boundaries*). *: )*

**14-18“**But when the *apostles Barnabas and Paul* heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: **15**“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. **16**In the past, he let all nations go their own way. **17**Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.” **18**Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.”

Be careful when someone tried to deify you or elevate you to a higher place than they should, because when you are placed on a pedestal, the only way off is down.

As a pastor, once in a while I get called “Father” by a person who is trying to be respectful (usually Catholic), or “Reverend” instead of my name, by those who want to formally acknowledge my title. I even have one person who insists on calling me “Rabbi” (which basically means Teacher).

I am often very uncomfortable with this, because I know that when someone elevates you to a level that is seemingly *holier* and more *sacred* than a “normal” person, they have a perception that you have some kind of *access to God* that *they do not have*. Which is obviously not true. We just have the job of pointing the way to Jesus.

I do like the word “Pastor” because it literally means “Shepherd” (one who serves, feeds, tends, protects, and cares for a flock). In the Bible it is never used as a title, it’s only used as a practical role description among others.

Unfortunately there are some Pastors and Religious leaders who, because of their pride, get caught up in this and are often soon brought down as a result, by enemy attacks, cancel culture or the result of their own scandals.

**Stardom to Stoning…(The crowd was turned against them)**

**19-20“**Then some Jews came from *Antioch and Iconium* and won the crowd over. 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.”

Apparently Paul was miraculously healed from the injuries of the stoning and went right back into the city of people that just tried to kill him for one more day.

*(If that happened to me and I was able to walk after being nearly stoned to death, I would have run away as fast as I could).*

In fact he finished His first missionary journey by backtracking through each of the cities that chased him away, and returned to Syrian Antioch where they started.

**The Return to Antioch in Syria**

**21-28“**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. **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. **24**After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, **25**and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.

**26**From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where 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.” <>

Debrief:

**V. 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.”

[ When I finished High School I joined YWAM (Youth with a Mission) in Lindale, TX (initially as part of Last Days Ministries but the schools combined at the time because Keith Green died). YWAM specialized in short-term missions outreaches where we would preach the gospel in many ways including skits and music in public places in the US and other countries. After every outreach we would have what’s called a “Debrief”, where we would talk about everything that took place during the outreach, and rejoice at those who received the message of the gospel. We felt it was necessary to look back and reflect on these experiences rather than just move on and forget them. ]

In fact, this is something that we are told in Genesis that God did, after each “day” of creation in Genesis 1.

After each thing that He created the Bible tells us that He looked upon it “*And God saw that it was good”.*

In fact after six days of work the Bible says;

**Gen. 1:31** **“**God saw all that he had made, and it was *very good.”*

Sometimes we need to do the same, look back at all that God has done through us, thank Him, and see that it is good.

When Paul and Barnabas “gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them”, they weren’t boasting, they were rejoicing and reflecting. Something that I believe we should do as well.

Here at North Shore Fellowship, we just finished a Summer Outreach Season at North Shore Fellowship. All summer long our church was busy every week, offering messages from the Word, worship music in public places, and praying for dozens of men, women, and young people who we were able to bring closer to Jesus. We saw the Lord move in many exciting ways. We saw healings, salvations, and were blessed to baptize seven people this summer. We prayed for many people throughout the summer (mostly at Ocean Grove) who were desperate for what the Lord had to offer them through us. It is always an exciting privilege and honor to go out and see how God uses us when we are obedient and available to Him.

A few weeks ago I had a very special experience of leading a man to Jesus who was the Father of a family I know, that I had just happened to walk past in a park. They asked me to stop and pray, so I did. I did nothing to prepare this man, it was all them, I was just willing, obedient and available.

That’s what God asks of you, to be used by Him in greater ways. He wants to change lives and set people free through you. He doesn’t require you to be ordained or commissioned, you just need to prepare the best you can, but the most important thing is to be willing, obedient and available, and watch as He does the rest.

The world is desperate for the truth that will set them free. It would be sad if that truth remained locked inside those who have it because we are not willing to share.

Paul began and ended his missionary journeys with persecution and opposition, but he experienced tremendous fruit and success throughout his ministry.

God used him to transform every region he visited, Galatia, Corinth, Ephesus, Rome, etc. All because he was willing, obedient and available.

**Romans 1:14“**I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. **15**That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.**16**For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.”

He was neither afraid or ashamed to preach the gospel, and neither should we be.

Why?

“because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.”

And that makes it the most important message in the entire world.

**May God give you courage, wisdom and boldness**

**as you make yourself,**

**willing, obedient and available**

**to share the gospel.**