

The Truth  
September 15, 2024  
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Acts 14:11-23

Opening: According to conventional wisdom, if you want to avoid conflict, what are the two things you should never bring up in conversation? Show of hands, has anybody stopped bringing up politics unless you are positive, it won't lead to conflict?

We may choose to not talk politics, but if we are followers of Christ, we are commanded to look for opportunities to share the good news of His free gift of eternal life.

In today's text we come to the end of the Apostle Paul's first missionary journey. The mission: preaching the gospel (to Jews and Gentiles), establishing new churches, and strengthening the faith of new converts. During this missionary journey, a pattern had developed for Paul and Barnabas:

- They went into a city preaching about Christ first to the Jews in the local synagogues and then to Gentiles. Sometimes, God enabled them to perform miracles to prove His power (Acts 14:3).
- Some believed and most did not, but others not only rejected the message, they tried to kill Paul and Barnabas.
- In Antioch, they were driven out of town by a jealous Jewish mob (Acts 13:50).
- In Iconium they won some to Christ but were threatened with stoning (14:5-6).
- They fled to the pagan city of Lystra (today's text). The first day the people tried to worship them as gods; the next day Paul WAS stoned and left for dead.
- Some disregarded the message; some disagreed and tried to discredit the Apostles. Some even tried to destroy them, but SOME DECIDED to trust Christ.
- Despite being abused and harmed Paul and Barnabas retraced their steps BACK through these same cities to encourage those who had believed.

The point: When we share the truth of who Jesus is, some will DISREGARD it, some will DISAGREE, some will DISRESPECT us, but SOME will DECIDE to follow Jesus. That's why we need to keep sharing and not be DISCOURAGED.

Some additional context before the text: Lystra was a totally pagan city that mainly embraced Greek beliefs and lifestyle. No synagogues to preach in here! The citizens of Lystra worshiped the pantheon of Greek gods like Zeus and Hermes (14:11). Paul was preaching Christ to these pagans and a man crippled from birth was listening so intently that the Spirit of God spoke to Paul: *"This man has the faith to be healed."* Paul told the man to "stand up" and he stood and walked for the first time in his life. Look at verse 11:

**Acts 14:11–23 (ESV)** — **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.

- In pagan folklore there was a legend that the Greek gods Zeus and Hermes visited the land disguised as mortals. No one would invite them to stay except one older couple. In their anger Zeus and Hermes wiped out the whole population except for the couple. It's likely these people remembered that story.
- Suddenly, the pagans were elevating these Jewish missionaries to Greek gods.
- Paul and Barnabas reacted swiftly turning this into an opportunity for the gospel.

**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.

- There is a nuance to how Paul witnessed to them about the true “living God.”
- Had this been a Jewish crowd, Paul would have quoted the Old Testament regarding the promised Messiah. How did he describe God to these pagans?
- In verse 17, how did Paul relate God to their own life experiences? Whom did these pagans think were the sources of things like provision, “food and gladness?” Today, most people don't worship mythological gods so to whom do they attribute the blessings they have in life? How can we talk about God's blessings to us (and to others) in a way that gives Him glory and credit?
- We call God's kindness to both the saved and the unsaved His “common grace.”
- Psalm 145:9: *“The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.”*
- Jesus said in Matthew 5:45 that God causes *“his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous...”* and in Luke 6:35 that God *“is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.”*
- The greatest display of God's common grace is His patience with sinners. 2 Peter 3:9 (ESV) says, *“The Lord is...patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”*
- Paul wrote in Romans 2:4 *“God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance.”<sup>i</sup>*
- Paul also wrote in Romans 1:20 that evidence of God's common grace in nature leaves people “without excuse” if we don't trust Christ for eternal life.
- God's common grace does not save people, but it “creates an environment to help people hear and respond to the gospel of Christ. It demonstrates God's patience and His desire for all to come to repentance and faith in Christ”<sup>ii</sup>
- Paul did firmly draw a contrast between their false gods and the one, true God.
- What Paul DIDN'T do was get into an argument about their beliefs. Remember, as we've said, *“No one was ever won to Christ at the end of an argument.”*

- Instead, Paul pointed them to the real source of blessings: *“All the good things you enjoy in life don’t come from your false, dead Greek gods; they come from the one, true, LIVING God, and He desires to have a relationship with you.”*
- Just as a great “altar call” was coming together and Lystrans were about to be saved, the bad guys in the black hats showed up; those jealous Jews who had been chasing Paul and Barnabas.

**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.

- One day the Lystrans wanted to worship Paul; now they tried to kill him!
- One moment they were ready to trust Christ; now they stoned His messenger.
- Their fickle nature and Paul’s reaction reminds me of an old song Frank Sinatra used to sing called, “That’s Life.” Hang with me and you’ll see my point.
- The lyrics of “That’s Life” say, *“That’s life, That’s what the people say, You’re riding high in April, shot down in May.”* One day they want to worship you and the next day they want to stone you for being a witness for Christ!
- The next line of the song says, *“But I know I’m gonna change that tune, When I’m back on top, back on top in June.”* Paul WOULD literally bounce BACK.

**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.

- I love the words in verse 20, *“...when the disciples gathered around him...”*
- In times of hardship God’s people should “gather around” those in trouble.
- Was Paul dead and then miraculously resurrected or just badly hurt and revived?
- We don’t know; but we DO know what Paul and Barnabas did next. They moved to the next town and started preaching some more!
- Now tell the truth, if we had just been stoned for sharing our faith and survived, would we go on to the next town to share our faith some more or just go home?
- Back to Sinatra: *“Some people get their kicks, Stomping on a dream (the Jews from Iconium that keep showing up “stomping” on the gospel!), But I don’t let it, let it get me down, ‘Cause this fine old world, it keeps spinnin’ around.”* <sup>iii</sup>
- When the good news of Christ is shared, some disregard, some disrespect, some try to destroy, but SOME DECIDE to follow Jesus, so we can’t let rejection get us down. We need to just keep sharing!
- That’s what Paul and Barnabas did.

**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.

- What do those verses say about Paul and Barnabas’ commitment to the mission?

- How can we apply that to how we share our faith with others? How can we follow Paul's example when he spoke to the unsaved about God's "common grace?"

#### So, What's the Takeaway?

- We might choose to not talk politics, but if we are followers of Christ, we are commanded to share the good news of His free gift of eternal life.
- When we share the truth of who Jesus is, some will DISREGARD it, some will DISAGREE, some will DISRESPECT us, but SOME will DECIDE to follow Jesus. That's why (like Paul) we need to keep sharing and not be DISCOURAGED.
- It's unlikely our lives will be threatened for sharing our faith, but sharing the truth of Christ might get uncomfortable or even cost us relationship or friendship.
- As the song says, "That's Life" for a follower of Christ! Like Paul, Barnabas, and Sinatra we can't let it "get us down." We just need to share our faith with "gentleness, respect," and love (not picking a fight) and let the Holy Spirit work on the hearts of those with whom we share.

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<sup>i</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Ro 2:4). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

<sup>ii</sup> <https://equip.sbts.edu/article/common-grace-care/>

<sup>iii</sup> Songwriters: Kelly L. Gordon / Dean Kay That's Life lyrics © Universal Polygram Int. Publishing Inc.