

A Bold Determination

Acts 14:1-28

Today we're going to be looking at the final stages of the First Missionary Journey of the Apostle Paul, Barnabus and the group that was with them.

In every successful Missionary Journey ever accomplished down through the ages there are two things that remain absolutely necessary: **Boldness and Determination**. Boldness to stand before the toughest of crowds - from street gangs to aboriginal warriors. And determination to continue, even when the going gets tough - from beatings and threats, to imprisonments and torture.

Yet even with all the boldness and determination you can muster, **if the missionary endeavor is not empowered and directed by the Holy Spirit of God**, the boldness and determination become simply the work of men, *and as such*, will never have the eternal impact in the lives of the people you seek to reach.

Be certain that successful Missionary Endeavors are the call of the Spirit and not the call of man or even a response to an apparent need.

We have been looking over the last few weeks at Paul's First Missionary Journey. Let's first look at where these events are taking place.

As we ended chapter 13, we read of the persecution that was coming against the Missionary team of Barnabus and Paul, and those that were with them. This attack came from the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia, even though the Holy Spirit had sent them there.

Acts 13

⁵⁰ But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. ⁵¹ But they (the disciples) shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium. ⁵² And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

When the team arrived in Antioch, they went to the synagogue and had the opportunity to share the hope of the gospel. Some rejected the message, some believed, others were curious; so they were invited to come back again the next Sabbath. During the week, the work had gotten out that these men had brought a powerful message of hope and the love of God.

Luke told us that "*almost the whole city*" turned out the next week to hear what these travelers were saying.

Then, due to extreme jealousy, the Jewish leaders stirred up some of the people and drove Paul and Barnabus out of the area. So, they left Antioch and traveled about 150 miles eastward to Iconium, a major city in the region of Lyconia.

Acts 14

¹ Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed. ² But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren. ³ Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

Once again, **although** Paul had told the Jews at Antioch that he was now turning to the Gentiles to deliver the message of the Gospel, as the party entered into Iconium, they **went into the synagogue first**. Luke tells us, *a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed*. And once again the Jewish leadership was outraged and they *stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren*.

But here Paul and company, instead of leaving, they **were determined** to stay a while to further explain the Gospel and to pour into the lives of the people who had received the message of hope. So, *they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord*. And as they ministered the Word of God in **boldness**, the Lord granted to them *signs and wonders* as a validation of their call as messengers of God and the message they were delivering to the people.

Luke tells us that in spite of the persecution and push back, continued *speaking boldly in the Lord*. When the Holy Spirit is moving, He gives great boldness to be able to proclaim the Word of God, even in difficult places. Not in some irritating and obnoxious way, but in the power of the Spirit. This whole idea of boldness seemed to represent the heart and passion of the Apostle Paul.

Early on in his salvation experience in Acts 9 Luke tells us, “...Saul (Paul) increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews... as he preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.”

When he first went to the Apostles in Jerusalem (again in Acts 9) Luke tells us “...he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists...,” **even though they tried to kill him**.

In Acts 13, we read how “...*Paul and Barnabas grew bold...*,” and told the Jews at Antioch that they would now minister to the Gentiles since the Jews would not receive the message of the Gospel and even were fighting against it.

Now here in Acts 14, even though (*and perhaps because*) there was great persecution in Iconium because of the Gospel, Paul and Barnabus “...*stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord.*”

When we get to chapter 19 we will read how in Ephesus, even though there was a lot of conflict due to the Gospel coming against their pagan gods and goddesses, Paul was able to go “...*into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.*” But some of the Jews hearts became so hardened, he withdrew from the synagogue and began teaching, sharing, and “...*reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.*”

We read in the pages of Acts how Paul would **speak boldly** before the Jewish leaders as well as the Roman leaders. He **spoke with bold** confidence, even though his freedom and life were continually threatened... he **spoke boldly** because the Holy Spirit was leading and empowering him to continue on in the work of the ministry.

Later, even while he was under house arrest, he continued to share the hope and the truth of the Gospel with everyone he could speak to, even the guards. All the way until the time of his execution, he shared the truth of the Gospel – *the rejection, the condemnation, the crucifixion, death, and burial and the power of the resurrection* – thereby offering the forgiveness of sin to all who would call upon the Name of Jesus.

As in many other places, so here in Iconium the Holy Spirit was demonstrating the truth of the Word through *signs and wonders*.

Luke doesn't tell us what these *signs and wonders* were, but no doubt there were times of healing and deliverance among the people. Perhaps other miracles, we just don't know. Although the Jewish leadership tried to *poison the minds of the people against the brethren*, God showed His good pleasure by granting supernatural *signs and wonders*.

You would think that with the **boldness** of the messengers as they proclaimed the power of the message of the Gospel, and the fact that God was granting them *signs and wonders* ..., you would have thought that there would have been **a massive, city-wide revival meeting**. But that was not to be the case. As a matter of fact, there was a **great division...**

*⁴ But the multitude of **the city was divided**: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles. ⁵ And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, **to abuse and stone them** (the disciples), ⁶ they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region. ⁷ And they were preaching the gospel there.*

Lystra and Derbe were not very far from Iconium – Lystra perhaps some 50 miles and Derbe some 20 miles further. If they were fleeing from persecution, they could have left the area entirely. What we need to understand clearly here is the fact that they weren't fleeing the persecution, as much as it was they were **looking for a place that would accept the message of the Gospel**.

Just as they *shook off the dust from their feet against Antioch*, I'm sure they did the same thing as they left Iconium. But even at Iconium, some had believed and so we find they actually will come again later. But for right now, they were looking for more opportunities to impart the truth to **willing ears and hearts**.

I think in any Missionary endeavor, we do good to heed the words of Jesus when He declared in Matthew 7:6 *"Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces."*

If the message is being **rejected** and in particular **violently rejected**, unless you hear from the Holy Spirit otherwise, it is best to *"shake the dust off your sandals"* and move on

And so Paul and company came to *Lystra and Derbe*. Here Luke tells us of an amazing healing and an amazing response from the people of the city –

*⁸ And in Lystra a certain man **without strength in his feet** was sitting, a **cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked**. ⁹ This man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, ¹⁰ said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked.*

First of all, Luke wants you to see the desperateness of this man's condition. He seems very intentional as he states the man's condition three distinct times in three different ways—

- *without strength in his feet*

- *cripple from his mother's womb*
 - *who had never walked*

What are you trying to say here Luke? You really need to get to the point.

Would you agree with me here that the man was in a hopeless situation? All of his life he had been lame – a similar situation as the Apostle Peter ran into at the Temple in Jerusalem.

Here, as Paul began to share the hope of the Gospel message, even with all of his issues in life, **this man focused in.**

But, we don't find that this man had said ANYTHING. He was simply paying attention to the message of God, given by the messenger of God. Perhaps he had been beaten down so much during all of his life, he didn't even pretend to have hope that the message was really for him.

Personally, I believe that as Paul saw this man, the Lord gave Paul the *Gift of Discernment*. God was telling Paul, this man is ready for a miracle and he's ready to "step out" in faith!!

So Paul *said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And the man leaped up and walked.*

There was **boldness** with Paul and **boldness** with this man – **both of them moving and acting in the fullness of faith in God.** Paul didn't whisper and the man didn't try to shuffle or tip toe. Paul *said with a loud voice*, and this man *leaped and walked.*

I don't care who you are. When this kind of miracle truly happens, and you're there to see it, you will be moved!

And so, the people of Lyconia were powerfully moved... moved in the only way they knew...

¹¹ Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" ¹² And Barnabas they called Zeus (in some of your versions it might say Jupiter), and Paul, Hermes (some of your versions might say Mercury), because he was the chief speaker.

In Greek mythology, there is a lot written about the Greek god **Zeus**. He's a powerful deity to the Greeks and plays a powerful part in their lives. In ancient Greek mythology, he is the god of the sky, lightning, thunder, law, order, and justice; and as such Zeus controlled ancient Greece and all of the mortals and immortals living there. He is pretty much equivalent to the Roman god **Jupiter**. For those who subscribed to the Greek religions, they recognized Zeus as the "father" of the other gods, rather

those gods were considered his actual offspring or not. To both the Greeks and the Romans, this god was a very powerful icon.

Hermes is described as one of the sons of Zeus. According to Greek religion and mythology, he was the god of trade, merchants, and commerce; as well as thieves and trickery; and sports and athletics (funny how those seem to run together at times, even today). **Hermes** was the emissary and messenger of the gods, and the supposed “*conductor of souls to the afterlife*”. He is comparable to the Roman god **Mercury**.

They must have considered Paul as **Hermes** since he was the primary spokesman of the group and Barnabus, probably a bit older than Paul was the one they considered as **Zeus**.

The people *raised their voices, (speaking) in the Lycaonian language*. There’s a good chance neither Paul nor Barnabus understood exactly what was going on right away since the Lyconian language was a hybrid mixture of both Greek and Syriac, as well as some of their local dialect – even harder to understand than **Spanglish**.

There is a possibility that they felt the people were excited because of the work of the One True God, Jehovah. **But very quickly the truth got through to them**. Particularly when they say their pagan priest...

¹³ Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes.

No way!! Can you imagine what was going on in Paul and Barnabus’ minds? This was **total pagan blasphemy...** and it was as a result of the power of God working in this man’s life.

How did what was so right, so quickly turn around to be so wrong?

But even in the midst of this confusion and blasphemy, Paul found a clear opportunity to fully explain the Gospel..., **or at least the opportunity to begin the message**.

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¹⁴ But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out ¹⁵ and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, ¹⁶ who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways.

¹⁷ "Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

¹⁸ *And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them.*

What was bad, started to turn around for good, but the people just wouldn't listen. They were so steeped in their pagan traditions, the message of the Gospel wasn't going to break through. They heard the words..., but like so many today, they weren't listening.

They had actually seen the **Hand of God in action**, but they weren't willing to acknowledge it was Him. They were trying to force-fit it all into their pagan rituals and understanding. This gave a perfect opportunity to the Jewish leaders of Iconium and Antioch to stage a rebellion. Funny, these Jewish leaders believed in the same God as Paul and Barnabus, but they were all too willing to side with the pagans against the Truth of Jesus as the Messiah...

Paul had told the people, *"We also are men... and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God."* But **they didn't want to hear that their religion was useless**. Everything they had staked their lives on for generations was simply the mythology and fables of man. Yet they weren't going to let go of it easily.

So, even as Paul and Barnabus were saying these things, *they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them.*

Then in came the Jews from Antioch and Iconium...

Acts 14

¹⁹ *Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they **stoned** Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.*

In the sight of the people of Lystra, Paul and Barnabus moved **from being gods to being demons**.

The people started out **worshipping the missionaries as deity**, then ended up **stoning Paul as the worst of criminals**.

It never ceases to amaze me how far into the darkness people will go when they aren't willing to accept the Truth.

The people of Lystra **believed a lie and didn't want to let it go**. Because they denied the Truth that was right in front of them, they stoned the Apostle Paul to death..., or did they?

Whether or not he was dead really isn't made clear either way. He could have been unconscious or even right at the brink of death – we don't know for sure.

One thing we do know is that Paul states to the Church in Corinth that there was a time when it was close...

2 Corinthians 12

² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago--whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows--such a one was caught up to the third heaven. ³ And I know such a man--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows--⁴ how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

Was that a death experience or a near death experience? We just don't know for certain. But whatever happened here in Lystra, the other brothers in Christ were concerned for Paul and gathered around him, no doubt praying for his recovery...

*²⁰ However, when the disciples gathered around him, **he rose up and went into the city.** And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.*

Are you kidding me? Did you catch that?

I don't know which to be more amazed at, the fact that **he rose back up after being stoned...** or that he **went back into the city.**

- This is the city that was so steeped in their pagan culture that they wouldn't hear the Good News of the Gospel.
- This is the city where the people had stoned him and left him for dead.

And now - *he rose up and went (back) into the city.* I would have loved to have seen the look on the people's faces as he walked back through the gate.

Luke doesn't tell us the outcome of his return, but he and the team don't stay long, *the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe*

²¹ And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

As they went on to Derbe, they were able to freely share the Gospel and many were converted, apparently without much conflict.

Then they traced back their steps to go through the cities where they had just recently ministered, and where they had just recently met with great persecution.

- They were **determined** to continue the witness of the Gospel.

- They had a **boldness** that came from the presence and calling of the Holy Spirit in their lives.
- Because of that **determination** and **boldness**... but mostly because of the infilling work of the Holy Spirit,
 - Neither the trials or the attacks stopped them
- They knew these people still needed the Gospel and so they continued. They returned ONCE AGAIN to the cities that had come against them!!

They returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch.

And there they found **some who had believed**... These were the ones who had become disciples of Jesus Christ through the preaching of the Gospel **even during times of trial, attacks and tribulations**.

When Paul shared with them *to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must **through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God,**"* he was a man speaking from experience.

- Not just a theology lesson,
- Not just book knowledge,
- Not just a training session or two.

Paul understood what it meant to proclaim the Gospel in spite of and through tribulations and trials.

They passed through the areas where they had shared the Gospel and formed Churches. They wanted make certain the Churches were in order. They appointed Elders, prayed for them, and *commended them to the Lord*.

²³ So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. ²⁴ And after they had passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. ²⁵ Now when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.

Here they took a little different route than they did going into the area...

²⁶ From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed. ²⁷ Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. ²⁸ So they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

That's the end of the First Missionary Journey. The unfortunate thing is, the reception of what God had done was still a little questionable. Because of religious pride and ignorance, the reception wasn't all that it should have been, but we'll get into that next time.

Boldness, and determination, but most of all the infilling and empowering of the Holy Spirit. This is the only true recipe for successful missionary endeavors.