

Acts- Church Afire! “From Applause to Assault,” Acts 14:1-22
Sermon Summary & 5-Day Devotional Apr. 12th, 2026 By Rev. Paul Hudson

Sermon Summary

In Acts 14:1–22, Paul and Barnabas experience remarkable spiritual success as they preach the gospel in Iconium—many believe, and God confirms their message through signs and wonders. Yet alongside that success comes immediate opposition. Unbelieving Jews stir up hostility, poison minds, and ultimately drive them out. This reveals a central truth: the gospel does not always produce peace where it goes. Instead, it often creates division, as people either receive it or resist it.

When Paul and Barnabas arrive in Lystra, God again works powerfully through them as Paul heals a man who had been lame from birth. However, the crowd completely misinterprets the miracle, believing the apostles to be gods and attempting to worship them. Despite Paul and Barnabas urgently redirecting their attention to the living God, the people struggle to let go of their idolatry. This moment highlights how easily spiritual effectiveness can lead to misplaced adoration, especially in hearts already shaped by false beliefs.

The situation takes a dramatic turn when opposition follows them to Lystra, and the same crowd that once praised them turns violently against them, stoning Paul and leaving him for dead. Yet Paul rises, continues preaching, and strengthens the disciples with the reminder that “we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.” The passage makes clear that spiritual effectiveness does not guarantee ease or visible success—in fact, it often brings hardship, requiring perseverance and unwavering faith in God’s ongoing work.

Key Takeaways

1. Spiritual Effectiveness Brings Opposition

When the gospel takes root and begins to change lives, resistance often follows. In Iconium, belief and hostility grow side by side, showing that the message of Christ forces a response. Opposition is not a sign that something is wrong—it is often evidence that the truth is confronting hearts. Believers should expect resistance and remain steadfast when it comes.

2. The Gospel Divides Before It Unites

The message of Christ does not produce universal acceptance; it separates those who believe from those who reject it. In Iconium, the city becomes divided as people choose sides. This division is not failure but part of how the gospel works in a fallen world. Unity comes through Christ, but only after the truth exposes the heart.

3. Spiritual Success Can Lead to Misplaced Adoration

In Lystra, the crowd responds to a miracle by elevating Paul and Barnabas to the status of gods. This reveals how quickly people can shift their focus from God to human instruments. Spiritual leaders and believers alike must guard against both giving and receiving misplaced glory. True faith always redirects attention back to God alone.

4. Crowds Are Unstable Without Truth

The same crowd that praises Paul and Barnabas quickly turns against them and participates in violence. Without a foundation in truth, public opinion is easily swayed and dangerously unstable. This serves as a warning not to measure success by popularity or approval. Faithfulness to God must remain the priority, regardless of how others respond.

5. Following Christ Requires Perseverance Through Hardship

Paul's stoning and continued ministry demonstrate that hardship is not an exception but a reality of faithful discipleship. His words remind believers that entering the kingdom of God involves enduring trials. Hardship does not mean God is absent—it often means He is at work in deeper ways. Endurance is essential for lasting spiritual fruit.

5-Day Devotional

Day 1: Expecting Opposition

Supporting Scripture: Acts 14:2–3; John 16:33

When you step out in faith and begin to live boldly for Christ, opposition should not surprise you. The same gospel that brings life also confronts sin, and not everyone will receive it. Resistance does not mean you are off track—it may mean you are exactly where God wants you to be. Instead of retreating, let opposition strengthen your resolve to trust God and continue forward.

Reflection Question: How do you typically respond when your faith is met with resistance?

Day 2: The Dividing Line of Truth

Supporting Scripture: Acts 14:4; Matthew 10:34

The gospel draws a clear line—some will embrace it, and others will reject it. This division can feel uncomfortable, especially when it affects relationships or communities. But truth always reveals what is in the heart. Rather than softening the message to avoid tension, we are called to stand firmly in it, trusting God with the results.

Reflection Question: Where might you be tempted to compromise truth to avoid conflict?

Day 3: Redirecting the Glory

Supporting Scripture: Acts 14:14–15; James 1:17

When God works through your life, people may notice—and even praise you for it. The temptation is to quietly receive that recognition or let it build your identity. But every good thing comes from God, and all glory belongs to Him. Like Paul and Barnabas, we must actively redirect praise back to the Lord, reminding others that we are simply vessels of His grace.

Reflection Question: In what areas of your life are you tempted to take credit for what God has done?

Day 4: Don't Chase the Crowd

Supporting Scripture: Acts 14:11, 19; Galatians 1:10

The crowd in Lystra quickly shifts from worship to violence, revealing how unstable human approval can be. If your faith depends on affirmation from others, it will constantly rise and fall. God calls us to seek His approval, not the applause of people. A steady faith is built on truth, not popularity.

Reflection Question: How much does the approval of others influence your decisions or faith?

Day 5: Enduring Through Hardship

Supporting Scripture: Acts 14:22; 2 Timothy 3:12

Following Christ is not a path of ease but of endurance. Hardships will come, but they are not signs of failure—they are part of the journey into deeper faith. God uses trials to refine, strengthen, and prepare you for lasting fruit. Do not lose heart in difficulty; instead, press on, knowing that God is working through it all.

Reflection Question: What hardship are you facing right now, and how might God be using it to grow your faith?
