

“Sharing Christ: Are we Doing it Right?”

Acts 14

Last week we were in Acts 13 looking at how Paul shared the gospel. Thankfully, Paul gave us the step 3-step formula for sharing the gospel in Colossians 7:14. . .

Don't waste your time going there because there is no Col. 7:14 and there is no 3 step 'this-is-how' its done! For which we praise the Lord! That means any of us by the grace of God, through the gifts of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit can share the gospel with the unique personality – quirks and all – that God has given us.

Yes, that's good but we still want to know are we doing it right? In other words, is my attempts at sharing the gospel effective? Is God using me to point people to Jesus? That we can find some answers for in the Bible and we can find some indication of whether we know we're on the right track in Acts 14. Remember, chapter divisions are helpful but they are not inspired and they sometimes make us forget we are still in the same context from the previous chapter.

Acts 13 ended with Paul, Barnabas and his companions sharing Jesus in Pisidian Antioch, a major city in the province of Galatia (so Galatians was written to all the churches Paul started here in Acts 13-14) and we read near the end of Ch. 13:49,

The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. ⁵⁰ But the Jews 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. ⁵¹ So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. ⁵² And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. ^{14:1} At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue...

Iconium (modern day Konya) is 175km east of Pisidian Antioch. This is the next major city eastward. Paul hit larger cities because they had Jewish settlements there and synagogues. And this is where we find Paul. Again, as a visitor Paul would have been invited to share something because of his Pharisaic and rabbinic background and we read,

There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.

Luke is a good writer and it literally reads 'he spoke in a manner that Jews and Gentiles believed; a large number.' Emphasizing the significant positive result. It's the same Greek word Luke used in Luke 5 when Jesus helped Peter miraculously catch a lot of fish.

We'll come back to positive results at the end of the message. But that's not the only result the gospel had. V.2;

² But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. ... ⁴ The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. ⁵ There was a plot afoot among the Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them.

The gospel does offend people. Not that the gospel itself is offensive, but the gospel tells you, you're religion is wrong, you're a sinner and you're not right with God. So if we're doing a good job of sharing the gospel you can expect

Opposition and the Spread of Misinformation **(14:2, 4-5)**

“The Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.” The word ‘stirred up’ means wake someone up. Get them excited, moving. The Gentiles were listening to Paul and Barnabas initially without incident until the ones who refused to believe got them all stirred up. How? Lies, misinformation. A good example of this will happen in Acts 19. There Paul’s ministry resulted in many people accepting Christ in Ephesus, including a number of people who practiced sorcery. One person named Demetrius, who made and sold statues of the goddess Artemis, gathered the shopkeepers in the market place and told them this fellow Paul was leading astray large numbers of people and almost the whole province of Asia saying manmade gods are no gods at all. He’s offending Artemis and we’ll all lose our businesses!’

Misinformation is used to twist the truth and cause people to fear the gospel and believers. Notice it all started with one person who was opposed to what Paul was doing. We saw this here last year when a few people got a lot of our own community all stirred up because of the Christian businessman who is building all these houses behind the Beer store and our cemetery. Someone spread a rumour saying he was going to erect a huge cross in the middle of the new community! It got so bad on the Westport Facebook page that our mayor had to tell people to stop the spread of misinformation.

It starts with those who refuse to believe, who start a smear campaign against God’s people and God’s Word and get the indifferent angry. Strangely, this is actually a sign that the gospel is doing its job. That if in our sharing the gospel, the enemy gets upset and starts causing havoc that means he’s worried because some are turning to Jesus.

This got so bad Paul learned about a plot to kill them so he took off further east and came to Lyconia, Lystra and Derbe. Lystra is south of Iconium and off the main route and Derbe was further east. Luke records a strange incident in Lystra that happened to Paul. While there Paul heals a disable man who had never walked who was listening intently to Paul’s message about Jesus. Almost identical to Peter and John’s healing of the lame man in Acts 3, Paul sees he has faith to believe and by God’s Spirit heals the man. Amazing! The crowds think this is wonderful but they misunderstand Paul and Barnabas thinking they are Greek gods Zeus and Hermes. This is another way the enemy deceives people when God’s message is working: He causes

Confusion with Other Religions **(14:11-18)**

Instead of actually listening to their message the folks of Lystra thought Paul and Barnabas were Greek gods coming down to be with the people. Why did they think this? Greek mythology was strong in those days and all kinds of tales had been written about the gods coming to earth. One local story in that area was that years prior, the Great Zeus and his spokesperson, Hermes, visited Lystra and nobody believed them except one older couple accepted who they were, invited them in for a meal into their humble home and were richly rewarded, while Zeus wreaked havoc on the town afterwards.

These people confused myth and religion and thought Zeus and Hermes were back! ‘Well, we’re not going to make the same mistake twice’. So they roll out the red carpet and have a parade and a priest from the temple brings some bulls and they are going to make a sacrifice to Zeus (Barnabas) and Hermes (Paul). Paul and Barnabas didn’t get what they were so excited about initially but when they find out who the people think they are, they tear their robes as a sign of

blasphemy. And Paul shares in v.15,

Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. ¹⁶In the past, he let all nations go their own way. ¹⁷Yet 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.” ¹⁸Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

These folks confused the gospel with another religion, as many have done. ‘You have your religion, I have mine.’ ‘All religions are the same.’ ‘We believe in God and Jesus too. We’re all on the same page.’ ‘Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed ... whichever one works for you.’ Sometimes we get responses like that and it’s frustrating that the gospel gets lumped in with any other religion. People get confused by all these. And here we see people just confused and not really listening to what Paul said about repenting from worshipping false gods and that the true God is the one who brings you rain and crops. Not Zeus.

Then some Jews came from Iconium and Pisidian Antioch (no small distance!) and “won over” the crowds. They persuaded/convincing the people of Lystra that maybe Paul and Barnabas were phonies or were sorcerers or who knows. Doesn’t really say but obviously they persuaded the people into thinking that Paul and Barnabas were there to harm them not to help them. And Paul is stoned outside the city, and they think he is dead.

And we see that misinformation or confusion can escalate and result in

Anger and Possibly Persecution **(14:19-20)**

I have very distinct memories of a few people getting really angry when I shared the gospel with them. One of them was an aunt of mine who was a devout Catholic and when I said that the place where we went to church didn’t teach salvation, she got pretty upset right there in the produce aisle where I worked.

Another time I recall an elderly Jehovah’s witness gentleman getting very upset when I shared Christ with him at our doorstep in Woodstock. Another time, I pointed out with Scripture to a young Mormon that Ezek. 37 does not say the teachings of God and Joseph Smith are joined. He end up yelling at me from the sidewalk here in front of the church, saying I was cursed. It’s not fun. It’s sad. The enemy has people confused and blinded to the truth but the Holy Spirit convicts people of the truth. That’s why they get angry. And many people who’ve initially gotten angry, have eventually come to Christ.

Persecution is real all around the world. Sometimes its more verbal and social media directed than physical. But it does hurt, and (unless we’ve done it insensitively) it is a way that shows we’re doing it right.

They thought Paul was dead. But he wasn’t. Whether it was a miracle or he was badly hurt were not sure. But he goes back into the city.

He goes back into the city. Wow. I wonder what they were thinking then?

We actually know we're 'doing it right' when the enemy is threatened by the gospel and people respond negatively toward the gospel. And yet, if we share Jesus with people we can also expect occasional ...

Success! **(14:1, 3, 6-10, 21-28)**

Heb. 4:12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Rom. 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

When Paul first shared the gospel in Iconium, "a great number believed" (v.1). Paul was speaking

"boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders" (v.3)

Just like Peter earlier in the book, Paul also had the power to perform miracles. And miracles confirm the message. Miracles are not an end in themselves. Their purpose, when God so allows, is to confirm His power to save people from their sins. Basically God & Jesus are saying, 'If I can make you walk and see I can also save your soul and forgive your sins. Paul had the opportunity to heal a man crippled from birth because he saw he had faith to be healed (vv.8-9) and continued preaching the gospel.

Sharing Christ and seeing people saved is one of the greatest moments in your life as a believer. But vv.21-28 point out that getting people saved is not the goal. Jesus said to go and make disciples, not get decisions. So as wonderful as it is to see people saved, it's just the beginning. Let's not forget

That discipleship is essential (vv.21-23)

Paul is left for dead at the end of v.20 but he goes back into Lystra! Then he goes further east to Derbe where

²¹ They preached the good news 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.

They returned to the cities they were driven out of, because if they were persecuted maybe the new believers were as well. And how encouraged were those new believers? They were strengthened and challenged to remain faithful. For however long they stayed they built them up in the faith and they appointed the more mature believers to be the elders, entrusting them to continue in making disciples. A disciple is one who follows Jesus. That's what we want to see happen to those who make decisions for Christ. When we lead someone to Christ by the power of God through the gospel, that is just the beginning. Notice how early Paul teaches new disciples of Jesus that they will

go through many hardships before they enter the kingdom of God (v.23). Paul modelled it – and many of them witnessed it – and they still said yes, to Jesus.

Luke summarizes Paul's return trip back to Syrian Antioch from where he and Barnabas were originally sent from in vv.24-28;

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 the door of faith to the Gentiles. ²⁸ And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

There's a great line on v. 26; - ... *they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.*

When we share the gospel, there will be some who accept Christ not because of us but because ...

We only accomplish what God's grace allows (vv.24-28)

V. 27 says it clearly. 'They reported all that God had done and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.' So even if "we do it right" its still up to God to change hearts. It's His message and His work. We are simply the messengers. And on the one hand that's very reassuring and takes the pressure off us to save people. On the other hand we have to grow in trusting God. Because all of us have family members or friends that we've been praying for, for years, and probably even witnessed to but there's been no response. No matter how effective we are and how clear a presentation we've had, we have to trust God to do His work.

And since we're the messengers of the gospel, it is we who can become the target of opposition. It is we who are 'narrow-minded, unbending, think we know it all' because of our message and so we risk verbal, social and physical persecution every time we share the gospel. And sometimes if we're honest, we avoid sharing Christ. But

Without risk there is no reward

Paul said in Rom. 10:14

And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?"

God's plan to save the world with the gospel is to entrust it to you and me. That's pretty crazy when you think about it, but also very confidence building. God thinks He can save some people through you and me sharing the gospel? Yup. Even if each one of us share His word differently in our own way? Yup.

As long as we use His Word, He will bless His Word as it goes forth.

Is. 55:10 *As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,*

11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us
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