

The Message of God's Grace

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[0 : 0 0] now can you turn with me in your bibles to the book of acts acts chapter 14 in the church bible that's page 1 1 0 9 as we continue to gain lessons from the life of barnabas as we continue to follow paul and barnabas on their mission we come to iconium this morning and let's again hear god's words 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 but the jews who refused to believe stirred up the other gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers 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 the people of the city were divided some sided with the jews others with the apostles there was a plot afoot among both gentiles and jews together with their leaders to ill treat them and stone them but they found out but they found out about it and fled to the lycanian cities of lystra and derby and to the surrounding country where they continued to preach the gospel i mean so this morning we're thinking about the message of god's grace as it comes to this city this city that is then thrown upside down that begins to riot in some places sadly we've been familiar haven't we in recent years with rioting cities we were in paris in the summer at the tail end of those riots but as we watch our news and as we are sometimes there we see destruction we recognize fear there are many causes sometimes it's racism sometimes it's an unlawful killing sometimes it's political protest but there are many factors causing citizens to come onto the street and to see chaos emerge well iconium stands quite different to that doesn't it because there is still riot and there is chaos but its cause is quite different here we find barnabas and paul coming on their mission a mission to speak god's grace to speak about god's love and god's kindness and god's forgiveness and there's two very different reactions there's one group and they're united together in love for this message and in love for the lord jesus as they come to discover him as the savior but then there's this other group a mixed group are united by hate and by opposition there's an old saying i think was the puritans that used to say the same sun that melts the ice also hardens the clay and we see that same softening and hardening in those different heart responses to jesus back then and still we see it today today we have a chance to slow down and to ask ourselves about grace what's so amazing about grace what is it about the grace of god that would cause people in iconium to utterly change their lives to gladly give up everything for the sake of following jesus what would cause john newton the former slave trader to sing about it maybe the the world's most popular hymn why is it that 2 000 years after these events do men and women and boys and girls still find joy and hope from the grace of god

that's what we're going to think about today we're going to get some encouragement remember barnabas his name means son of encouragement here's how barnabas can encourage us today as we find ourselves in the city of iconium which is right in the heart of modern day turkey barnabas is going to encourage us to believe to believe to believe that god's grace really is amazing he's going to encourage us to stand firm against bitter opposition and he's going to encourage us to boldly live for jesus in a hostile world but we're going to spend most of our time thinking about barnabas encouraging us to believe just how amazing god's grace is so back to our text verse one we are in iconium it's in the the roman region of galatia and paul and barnabas they follow their usual pattern and they go first to the jewish synagogue they begin speaking to religious people those who were looking to find when their messiah would come but they don't just speak to the jewish religious folks they speak so effectively that a great number of jews and greeks believed here we're seeing again that god's kingdom grows that god's kingdom is wide they're a mixed group of people from different backgrounds and cultures and religious backgrounds are being brought in to trust in jesus as lord now we're told they're speaking effectively causing people to believe so we need to ask ourselves what was their message and luke just gives us a summary sometimes we get details sometimes we

get summary in verse one and we did verse one we're told they spoke effectively in verse three we're told they're speaking boldly for the lord who confirmed the message of his grace the message they bring is of god's grace so that's what we need to think about today let's let's go by way of definition first what is grace grace is one of those words that we hear a lot in church we also hear about it in our world it's not an uncommon words biblically speaking grace is the love of god shown freely salvation given freely through jesus to guilty sinners and that love comes freely not based on our merit and that love that saves us despite our lack of merit so the grace of god is his love shown freely to us and giving us salvation even though we are guilty sinners and it's not because we earn it or deserve it it's because god chooses to be kind to us okay so that's grace and that's the message that's doing two things in this city does always those two things in people's hearts it's turning lives right side up because now there are people who are believing in jesus now they know god's love now they're back in relationship with god it's what we're made for but it's also turning the city upside down because some people fiercely oppose god and his grace and his works i had a call with a missionary friend this week and we were talking about this and that and at one point he stopped and he said you know what if if the city where i live if the society in which i am now living if they would discover the doctrines of grace they would discover god's grace he said that would change everything in this nation he was right god's grace is wonderful it's transforming we can think about god's grace being like a precious diamond think about precious diamond it it does two things it

sparkles with beauty but we also know a diamond is is strong and powerful as we're going to think about grace being like that diamond strong powerful and sparkingly beautiful and we're going to use we don't have much as i said we've only got look somebody here in the book of acts we're going to use a letter that i the people in iconium would have read the letter to the galatians to help us to consider different faces of that diamond of god's grace that we might see and appreciate more of it so paul just a short amount of time after these visits then wrote a letter to the churches in galatia and iconium is one of those churches so we're going to turn to the book of galatians for a few moments to think about how amazing god's grace is first of all we're going to go to galatians chapter 1 verses 3 and 4 to recognize how amazing it is that in god's grace there is rescue there is great hope and freedom from god so i'm going to read galatians 1 verses 3 and 4 which says to us grace and peace to you from god our father and the lord jesus christ who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age according to the will of our god and father before we get to that text there's a problem that you and i share and we share it with all of humanity and that problem is guilt and our sense of guilt perhaps it's because of things in the past perhaps it's because of things in the present but our conscience we know this our conscience will tell us maybe our family or our friends will tell us of our guilt and certainly if we read the bible openly and honestly it will tell us that there are parts of our life where all is not well all is not right between us and other people and ultimately between us and our god but the challenge that we have in our day is that while guilt still remains a lot of people in our society have lost a sense of god the reality of god therefore have lost a sense that there is a god who forgives and so we're losing a sense of forgiveness which i think is why you're much more likely to hear about people being cancelled than debts being cancelled where people are as likely to pursue revenge as they are to seek reconciliation and so we have this problem of guilt and we need to discover where is freedom from guilt to be found well if we take that problem to to the bible and to the message of the bible we need to discover first of all who god is and we discover that god is our creator that god is utterly holy he is without sin and he's called us to be holy too to be sinless to be perfect and again as we examine our hearts we know that we fail that test that we miss those targets the bible calls that sin the bible calls it sin when we turn our backs on relationship with god the bible calls it sin when we break god's law the bible calls it sin when we choose to worship created things rather than our creator and so the truth that we all need to face up to

is that according to god and his word that guilt that we experience that guilt is real that we do stand guilty we do stand under judgment that we carry that burden of guilt with us and the question remains how can we be free of it as i was thinking about this i was thinking about the difference between traveling by airplane and a backpacking holiday or euro star so i i we took the euro star to france and the euro star is wonderful but the one drawback of euro star is there's never a point where you get to put your luggage on the carousel and wave it goodbye you know a wonderful moment of relief i always carry a backpack that moment of there was never that relief so rather than that you have this burden that just gets heavier especially when you come back from holiday bags

always get heavier the burden remains life can feel like that because of our guilt where can we lay our burden down where can we see it being removed on the carousel and that's where god's grace comes in that's where galatians chapter one comes in verse three grace and peace to you there is grace from god our father and the lord jesus christ how does this grace come it comes because jesus willingly gave himself for our sins to rescue us and that salvation that rescue that freedom from guilt comes because of the will of our god and father god chooses to love us freely and to remove our guilt when we don't earn it or deserve it the father wills to save us jesus's son wills to sacrifice himself to take our sin to bear our burden of guilt to pay the price in full so that when we trust in him by grace that burden of our guilt and our sin it is removed not just on a carousel it's thrown to the bottom of the ocean and so jesus speaks grace of freedom and rescue he says come to me all you who are weary and burdened and i will give you rest how does he give us rest by dying for our sins to remove our guilt to rescue us from spiritual slavery so that's one way that grace is amazing because it gives hope and freedom of an escape from the guilt that we feel the second face of that diamond of grace takes us to the idea of acceptance and to galatians chapter 2 verse 16 where paul says know that a person is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in jesus christ there's amazing security in god's grace an amazing sense of belonging and acceptance in the good news of what jesus has done the story of your life and mine i imagine if we were to think about it in this way is one where we're often seeking acceptance that begins in childhood what behavior is acceptable to my parents in a classroom to this group of people i want to be friends with that sense of seeking acceptance builds as we become teenagers becomes really important to figure out really challenging how do i fit in style matters music matters events matter but it doesn't stop there does it it continues as adults

how do i fit in as i begin this new job as i try and find my place in the workplace how do i find acceptance from my peers and in wider society maybe we've discovered the problem that acceptance can be really hard to win and at the same time really easy to lose one false move can be the end of a friendship can mean exclusion from the group can be a cause of real anxiety what if i am unmasked what if people discover something terrible about me and they want nothing to do with me and so we can find ourselves longing for someone who knows us who really knows us but who won't walk away who will see the worst but will stay committed to us and that again is what god offers to us in the gospel because our acceptance is not based on us it's based on our perfect savior jesus we too have put our faith in christ jesus that we may be justified by faith in christ and not by the works of the law how are we justified how are we accepted by god how are we approved of by a holy god the good news is that it's not based on what we do it's not based on our works if it was we would have no hope but it is based on what jesus has done and our putting our faith in him god's acceptance of us is not earned it's not earned by your holiness it's not earned by your religious efforts that acceptance comes only by grace the love of god freely shown to sinful people who do not deserve it and the good news is because it's grace god's acceptance of us in christ cannot be lost even when believers sin and we do sin all of us god's grace can't be lost our approval can't be lost because it's not about me it's about jesus and my faith in him do we hear the strength of that truth do we appreciate the beauty of that truth when we're searching for acceptance here is the voice of the king of the universe here is the one voice that matters here's the one audience to live for and he says if you're trusting in jesus i love you you're mine you belong to me and that's permanent our friends and our families maybe you've discovered this when you become a christian they may not approve and that can be a hard loss to bear but to understand god's grace and to understand the acceptance that we have in jesus that's a grace that can help to bear that and any other loss that we experience one more face in this diamond of grace that we need to consider and it's that of identity galatians chapter 3 and verse 26 speaks to us of our amazing privilege so in christ jesus you are all children of god through faith think about what this says to our identity but before we get there we need to talk about taylor swift

[20 : 16] for a moment and i am not let me just put it out there i'm not a taylor swift fan but i did discover interesting fact in her recent i don't know how recent two of the eras 16 wardrobe changes in one concert 16 wardrobe changes i doubt if i do that in a year she can do it in two hours amazing do you know what it says apart from the fact she's good at changing clothes it says the image and identity matters really matters and we know many of us that that can be a source of pressure and confusion and anxiety again as we have lost that sense that we are made in the image of god as we've lost that sense that that's where our identity is to rest even as christians sometimes we forget that we belong to him through jesus we can be profoundly insecure about our identity and then we

hear the modern message again and again you can be anything you want you can be anyone you want you can be free to redefine your identity over and over in any way you want a message that is both untrue and really unkind and so the question then is haunting our culture what do my classmates say is okay this week what do my colleagues what does my culture say is acceptable this month this year so much anxiety because of this question of identity think about what god's grace has to say to our sense of identity in christ jesus you are all children of god that's how we are to see ourselves who am i in christ jesus i'm a child of god i live with god he lives in me if we had a spiritual passport it would say child of god citizen of heaven that's who we truly are above and beyond anything else that defines us and that by god's grace our prayer should be that it would help us to live out that true identity so that when we struggle with who we are when we struggle with what we see in the mirror that we would remind ourselves of god's grace that transforms our identity so that we become new creations in christ that we are loved by our father that we would tell ourselves over and over the story of the prodigal son and the story that jesus told of the son who rebelled against his father wished his father was dead took his share of the money wanted to create his own identity living wild and free and made a wreck and a mess of everything and came home in shame and disgrace and confessing his sorrow how does his father receive him he runs to me through his arms around him through a feast for him give him every sign of honor and welcome that's grace j.i. packer a famous theologian who died just a year or two ago he said christians need to learn to tell themselves these truths every day to understand our identity i am loved by my father do we believe that i am a child of god do we know

that's who we truly are heaven is my home jesus is my brother and every christian is my brother or sister grace is amazing in the rescue that we have in jesus in the acceptance we have in jesus in the new identity we have in jesus it came to iconium changed everything what about for us today has it changed everything for us are we believing this to be true are we resting and receiving jesus and him alone for salvation are we enjoying him today barnabas encourages us to believe that grace is amazing very briefly two more things that barnabas encourages us to when we're going back to iconium in acts chapter 14 he also encourages us to stand firm against bitter opposition iconium does many things for us it also reminds us that the christian life is a battle ground not a playground that spiritual opposition is real so we see that the church is working that god's grace is transforming as the word is being preached but we also see the devil is resisting what shape did it take in the first century in turkey do we see parallels to our own day verse 2 the jews who refused to believe stirred up the other gentiles and poisoned their minds against their brothers poisoned their minds see that barnabas and paul they're false teachers that jesus they're talking about he's not the son of god he's not the savior he's a false messiah they're really narrow-minded saying that the only way to be saved is through faith in jesus they're bad members of society their values don't match up to society's values they gang up on paul and barnabas the people of the city were divided some sided with the jews others with the apostles and there was a plot to ill treat and to stone paul and barnabas so the gospel of grace wonderfully breaks down divisions within society so jews and gentiles together understand that jesus is the savior for them but the gospel of grace also causes people to come together into a mob to try and destroy the message and the messengers and so barnabas and paul they had to flee according to verse 6 they flee to the lycanian cities of lystra and derby but notice what they do in verse 7 they continue to preach the gospel they're running for their lives and they're preaching the message of grace as they go barnabas encourages us to stand firm against bitter opposition acts can helpfully be thought of as part 2 of luke's work that we find in the bible part 1 of course is his gospel and in luke's gospel in part 1 of his work as we discover jesus mission of salvation there we also discover many times jesus warning christians warning his disciples to be ready for bitter opposition here's just a few examples luke chapter 10 verse 3 i am sending you out as lambs among wolves we don't need to know too much about the animal kingdom to know that means that being a christian can be can be scary it can mean enemies and opposition chapter 12 verse 51 jesus said do you think i came to bring peace on earth no i tell you but division exactly what we see in iconium there is this battle raging spiritual battle jesus does bring peace for his people but then there are others who are divided and who stand against him and ultimately everybody is either for or against jesus and we all need to decide where we stand chapter 21 of luke's gospel verse 17 jesus puts it very bluntly everyone will hate you because of me we just need to look at what happened to jesus rejection and suffering before glory to understand that that is the pattern that we can expect in the christian church too and

so like barnabas we need to stand firm we need to continue to speak and to live for jesus how do we do it i think first and foremost we need to really believe the gospel of grace if we don't really believe that we've been rescued we're accepted by god we got a secure a new identity in christ then maybe we won't take a stand maybe we'd be tempted to give up but when we believe that in jesus we have everything that's the first thing we need we also need to pray we need to pray for help and for courage that's what we're going to do on wednesday please join us if you can we need help to stand firm we need to rely as the apostles did on the spirit of god remember jesus said to his disciples when you are opposed and when you have to give an account in front of enemies the spirit will help you to speak give you words when you need them we also need to draw strength from the church we need to draw strength from one another not to live in isolation because opposition is hard and we need to have our hope set in final victory barnabas encourages us to stand firm against bitter opposition and then the last thing that i want us to notice and again this is just brief is that barnabas encourages us to boldly live for jesus in a hostile world thinking about iconium i got to thinking about john g paten some of you don't know who john g paten was he was a missionary a scottish missionary in the mid-19th century to what was then called the new hebrides which is now called vanuatu and to read paten's story is to read a story of courageous faith because he went to work among people known to be cannibals man-eating people and he was warned before he left scotland don't go it will literally eat you alive you've got a really vital ministry going on here in glasgow why would you go over there when you're doing useful things over here and what you see in paten's life is someone who is ready both to live and to die for the lord jesus to read his story he was attacked often many of the tribes people tried to poison him they tried to use black magic on him he could tell story after story of being hunted by gangs wielding machetes but paten was a man who boldly lived for jesus and over time people became christians and churches were established and one historian reckons that paten's influence was such in the region that towards the end of the 19th century one in six of all ministers in australia followed paten in going on mission that's someone living boldly for jesus in a hostile world that's the pattern of barnabas and saul and it's always encouraging i think to see this kind of life to read those kind of stories to see the impact of men and women who have faith in god and who act with courage so verse three we see that after people have been stirred up and after minds have been poisoned against the brothers paul and barnabas spent considerable time there speaking boldly for the lord no one's going to stop them sharing the good news of god's love no one's going to stop them talking about god's grace that saves sinners it's too amazing they won't stop verse three we see them boldly living out their faith and god confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders here's the wonderful thing god wants people to be saved and so god turned people's hearts by his spirit working in power so miracles were happening to give evidence that yes people should listen to baul and barnabas and as we saw in verse seven even as their lives are threatened as they're on the run they can't stop speaking they continue to preach the gospel in romans chapter one verse 16 paul said this and i'm sure barnabas would agree i am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of god that brings salvation for everyone who believes barnabas and paul saw the power of god's gospel at work they saw lives they saw cities they saw cultures being transformed do we believe that the gospel has that same power today do we believe it for ourselves that god's grace can change me from the inside out do we believe that god can change our city and our nation and the nations of the world to read the book of acts to look at the life of barnabas and paul is to be encouraged to be encouraged to pray that god would work by his power and through his grace to save many again come on wednesday pray do the work of god barnabas encourages us doesn't he to speak to proclaim jesus's good news to people who are anxious to people who are confused to people who don't know what the bible teaches and barnabas encourages us to practice what we preach to let our light shine so that men might see our good deeds so as to glorify our father in heaven because the world needs the message of god's grace we need the message of god's grace let's pray together