

World Wide Witness: God's Mission Strategy

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[0 : 0 0] 1 1 0 9 Acts chapter 14 verse 1 at Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue there they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed but the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the 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 do miraculous 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 the Gentiles and Jews together with their leaders to ill treat them and to stone them but they found out about and fled to Lyconian the Lyconian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country where they continued to preach the good news in Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet who was lame from birth and had never walked he listened to Paul as he was speaking

Paul looked directly at him saw that he had faith to be healed and called out stand up on your feet at that the man jumped up and began to walk when the crowd saw what Paul had done they shouted in Lyconian language the gods have come down to us in human form Barnabas they called Zeus and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker the priest of Zeus whose temple was just outside the city brought bulls and reeds to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them but when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this they tore their clothes and rushed into the crowd shouting 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 in the past he let all nations go their own way yes 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 heart with joy even with these words they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over they stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city thinking he was dead but after disciples had gathered around him he got up and went back into the city the next day he and Barnabas left for Derby they preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples then they returned to

Lystra Iconium and Antioch 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 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 after going through Poseidia they came into Pamphylia and when they preached the word in Perga they went down to Atalia from Atalia they sailed back to Antioch where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed 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 and they stayed there a long time with the disciples thanks very much well just to remind people that while we go through this section on Wednesday evenings in our gospel communities we pick up on the same study we apply it a little bit more it's an opportunity to go through in further discussion and questions that you may have as we seek to apply it to our lives and to us as a church so come along on Wednesday evenings and be involved in that and of course if you have other questions at the end please feel free to talk with me afterwards but keep your Bibles open there at Acts 14 and it's a wonderful adventurous story and we're going to hear what God has to say to us from this let's pray first of all father thank you for your servants of years ago people like Paul and Barnabas who went from place to place to bring the good news thank you for your friends thank you for your friends thank you that the good news came to countries like Ireland thank you that people came to us whether from home or friends or through some other means we pray that the good news of Christ would impact us afresh this morning and

that you would help us together individually and as a church family together see the different ways in which we have been called to be ongoing servants of that same gospel empower us fill us with your spirit as we hear you today amen well do you remember the mission impossible films have you seen them it begins with mission commander swanbeck speaking to agent ethan hunt via a recorded message here's how it starts good morning mr hunt your mission should you choose to accept it involves the recovery of a stolen item named chimera you may select any two team members but it's essential that you have a third member of your team and that is naya nordoff hall you have 48 hours to recruit miss hall and meet me in seville to receive your assignment as always should any member of your team be caught or killed the secretary will disavow all knowledge of your actions

this message will self-destruct in five seconds you remember it exciting isn't it well axe has a similar theme the book is a recorded message outlining the mission of god and our mission commander is the risen lord jesus who gives us the church his assignments so if we were to turn axe into a feature-length film and to see it on the hollywood screens it might go something like this good morning christian your mission should you choose to accept it involves speaking the good news of jesus christ to all peoples in all nations your team members are the church family but it is essential that you also have with you the holy spirit he will empower you enable and equip you to complete your mission as always it is possible that your team or team members will be caught or killed should this happen your captain will ensure the mission is completed this message will be repeated till all have heard now while axe introduces us to god's mission it also introduces us to god's mission strategy god has chosen his church the people that belong to him to be the means they're at the very heart of his strategy in bringing the good news of jesus to all nations and the way that that happens is very simply this churches are to plant churches and that's what we have here in chapter 14 when the gospel is preached from city to city and place to place look what happens look at verse 23 of chapter 14 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 reaching out with the gospel lead to churches being established you see god's missionary strategy is this that churches would reach out with the good news and establish new churches who in turn reach out with the good news and establish new churches that's the cycle and that's the pattern and crucially the team members the people who have been called to do it are people like you and me the church family there is no such thing as an individual christian who goes on about their own business it is a gathering a people together the question is are we going to accept this mission from our commander the risen lord jesus well before we see what is involved in church planting let me just mention a few things here what are we doing in terms of church planting well we've got kinsale haven't we so there's people here who are involved in the kinsale project the aim to see a church established in that town so it applies to those who are specifically involved well you maybe think well i'm not involved in that well this church here in some ways this is an ongoing church plant we're not fully established in terms of we're actually still reliant on outside support financial support for us to be able to function the way that we do so in some ways we are still in a church planting state but then of course there are other places

and other ways in which we can be involved there are other churches around the globe that need our support and need our help maybe it means one of you or me or somebody being sent by this church to be involved in church planting so it's extremely relevant to us all and what we want to look at here this morning are four things that we need in place to see churches planting churches the first one is this there must be a faithful communication of the gospel look at verse one and what we're going to do is we're going to look at the first four verses and just see how each of those verses are expanded and worked out through the rest of chapter 14 so verse one we'll get to in a minute wherever God's people went there was a clear and consistent focus verse one at Iconium so they're in Turkey

[12:03] Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue and there they spoke so effectively they were speaking the good news that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed and in case we forget what our risen commander has called us to do we are reminded again and again verse seven they went to other places where they continued to preach the good news in verse 24 after going through Pisidia they came to Pamphylia and when they had preached the word in Perga they went down to Atalia so that is the focus now the problem is not knowing that this is what we should do I think we're all clear about that the difficulty is is what do I say how do I actually communicate this message well look at how Paul communicates the gospel Paul has just healed a

man who has been lame from birth and we're going to come back to him in a little while but look at the response of the people to Paul after this healing verse 11 when the crowd saw what Paul had done they shouted in the Lycanian language the gods have come down to us in human form

Barnabas they called Zeus he was the kind of the main god amongst all the gods so Barnabas was called Zeus and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker and the priest of Zeus whose temple was just outside the city they brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices what a response nobody has ever done that for me it's quite extraordinary isn't it to be thinking they were gods now we mightn't find many followers of Zeus and Hermes today walking around Carigoline or Cork but we have lots of people in fact all of us have our own gods that we worship and follow we all sacrifice to these gods we all give our life to someone or to something in the hope that it's going to bring us joy and happiness and peace to our lives so we give our lives to things like our job to leisure in the hope that it's somehow going to satisfy us we give our lives to our partners to our spouse we give our lives to our children in the hope that they are the ones who are going to fulfil us we sacrifice daily at the altar of family and work and sport longing to be filled

Tim Keller is helpful here in his book Counterfeit Gods this is how he explains that he says each one of us has our own temple or shrine whether it's office towers spas and gyms studios or stadiums where sacrifices must be made in order to procure the blessings of the good life and ward off disaster but the problem is these gods will always fail us they always leave us empty longing for something more so look at how Paul responds verse 14 when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this though somebody had obviously translated it to them they tore their clothes and they rushed out to the crowd shouting men why are you doing this we too are only men human like you we are bringing you good news telling you to turn away from these worthless things these empty unfulfilling gods and to turn to the living god who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them you see the reality is we are never going to find our true meaning and our purpose in or in anything else but the living god trying to find our joy in someone else or something else is either going to disappoint you or it's going to destroy you we are only truly satisfied when we repent and turn to god verse 16 in the past he let all nations go their own way going their own particular path but yet he has not left himself without testimony each day god is telling us that he is here he has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven crops in their seasons he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy god is so gracious giving us one good gift after another and if he does this to us even when we turn away from him how much more will he fill our hearts with joy when we turn to his son jesus christ this is a message of good news this is what fills the hole in every single human heart christ alone meets our deepest need he satisfies our greatest longing this is the message that we can begin to communicate to people around us so first in our church planting ministry we need a faithful communication opposition of the gospel to the people around us second we need to prepare for consistent opposition this gospel may be good news but you know what not everybody will like it look at verse one the end of verse one there they spoke so effectively that a great number of jews and gentiles believed but the jews who refused to believe stirred up the gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers and it wasn't just clever arguments or verbal abuse verse five there was a plot of foot amongst the gentiles and jews together with their leaders to will treat them and stone them but they found out about it and they fled however just because you move to another place or another location or from one office to another office

it doesn't mean to say the opposition is going to stop verse 19 then some jews came from Antioch and Iconium and they won the crowd over they stoned Paul dragged him out the city thinking he was dead sometimes we look at this book and think oh it was so easy they just preached and people became followers of Jesus now these guys he was stoned thinking he was dead this is how hard it was throughout the history of the church God's people have always faced opposition to the gospel in fact today in this decade more people are imprisoned and killed for telling the gospel than at any other time in history put together the issue for us is not will I face opposition but when I face opposition in other words we have got to be prepared for it even in a so-called

Christian country as Ireland look at verse 21 they had preached the good news in that city this was in Derby and they had won a large number of disciples then they returned to Lystra and Iconium and Antioch they had already been there then they went back to them why did they do that well verse 22 to be strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith why we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom they said let's be honest with ourselves we

don't do hardship and suffering very well in fact as soon as something gets difficult we want to quit don't we we want out but if we know in advance that things are going to be tough if we're told they're going to be tough we can actually prepare ourselves for that eventuality we can be ready and equipped as

[21 : 14] God's people and the way to prepare for opposition is not to get away look at verse 22 to strengthen the disciples and encourage them to remain true to the faith now that's the responsibility of each and every one of us here that's why we've had students up here on the last couple of Sundays because we need to strengthen them we need to encourage them as they go into a hostile environment of university life where it is hard we need to get alongside them we need to be praying for them we need to speak the gospel into each other's lives whether you're going into work whether you're at home wherever you are Alex preached a great sermon on that very subject you can listen to it again online from first Thessalonians all about asking each other how is your faith encourage spend time one to one reading praying just do it make it natural

I spoke with somebody this week and they said it should be so natural for us just to open the Bible and read not to have it to explain why we're doing it not to have to explain why we're praying but just to do it to encourage each other in the faith things okay we mightn't live in an area where we're going to be imprisoned or killed but we do live in an increasingly secular place where the Christian faith is just not tolerated and if you are to identify yourself as a follower of Jesus whether you're in school or if anywhere else if somebody knows that you're a Christian they're going to think you're mad bad or sad and it's going to be tough so let's strengthen each other in the faith speak the gospel pray for each other so may there be a faithful communication of the gospel and let there be a preparation for consistent opposition third we need a clear purpose of signs and wonders in our church planting endeavours the gospel may be opposed by people but God has confirmed the truth of his gospel in amazing ways we can believe it it's true look at what it says in verse 2 and 3 we'll read verse 2 again the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles pointed 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 do miraculous signs and wonders now when we read a section like that we usually get two reactions and I'm going to judge you'll get these two reactions here within this group one person will say oh but these things are finished the miraculous is finished we don't need them anymore we've got the bible somebody else might say oh this is exciting great when can we kind of move on from the gospel stuff and get down to the real work of the church and see some miracles happen well maybe it's no surprise but I actually think both of those responses are wrong let's see what the text says first signs and wonders are not the gospel we must never think that the miraculous is a suitable replacement for the gospel it's not that some churches are into well you know the church over there they're into telling people about Jesus they're great at doing the preaching side but over here this church they're great at doing the miracle side no the emphasis is clearly on the necessity to speak the gospel look at the beginning of verse 3 so Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there speaking boldly for the Lord wherever they went this is what they did this was their focus their aim their priority you see signs and wonders the miraculous do not save people they don't transform people's inner heart in fact we're told in Matthew 24 verse 24 that the miraculous can even be imitated by Satan he can't imitate the gospel the gospel is unique but he can imitate signs and wonders so we must never get confused only the gospel the good news about Jesus is going to save people that's why we are sent to preach the good news we are not sent to do signs and wonders however second signs and wonders confirm the gospel while the miraculous can't save people they do have their place again look at verse 3 they spend their time there speaking boldly for the Lord who confirmed the message of his grace miracles by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders let me quote John

Piper here I think he's very helpful if you don't know who he is he's a pastor in the states he said signs and wonders are God's witnesses to his word they are not in competition with the word they are not against the word they are not over the word they are divine witnesses to the value and truth and necessity and centrality of the word in other words we say they authenticate the gospel they are signs like massive big sign posts not pointing to themselves but pointing to the gospel of grace pointing to the Lord Jesus to say this message is true you can believe it and you can trust it so they're not the gospel but they confirm the gospel and third signs and wonders actually assist the gospel by this

[28 : 06] I mean they can help people come to faith in Christ and that seems to be the purpose of the miraculous all the way through the book of Acts if you read through the book of Acts you'll discover that there are 17 times where something miraculous happens and immediately what happens after is it helps or leads or assists somebody to become a follower of Jesus look at the way the two of them are with each other we've got a great example of this here so look at verse 8 here we have in Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet who was lame from birth and had never walked he listened to Paul as he was speaking Paul looked directly at him saw that he had faith to be healed and called out stand up on your feet at that the man jumped up and began to walk miraculous amazing but please note this healing is not done in isolation it's accompanied by the gospel so when we get to verse 15 after all this crying out thinking oh these are actually gods who've come down what does he say in verse 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 and the results of preaching this gospel well we know some opposed so miracles in themselves actually don't save anybody but some actually also believed and we see that in verse 23 because Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church including this place where this miracle had happened and they where am I and with prayer and fast had committed them to the Lord in whom they had put their trust they had become followers of Jesus you see God can if he pleases use signs and wonders to break cynical attitudes to the gospel destroy false understandings of the gospel melt people's hearts they don't save but they can assist in people believing well that leaves us with one more and probably the biggest question that you've all got signs and wonders today well while miracles can and still do happen it is not something that we can make happen look at verse 3 again

Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there speaking boldly for the Lord the Lord is the emphasis here who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders signs and wonders are acts of God which he enables people to do as he pleases to confirm his gospel and to see his word spread to all nations in other words we don't get to decide when and how that happens any more than we don't decide who becomes a Christian and who doesn't acts says an awful lot about signs and wonders in the miraculous but they are never seen as necessary or essential to gospel proclamation however that does not mean we should not pray for God to work his miracles

I believe we should in fact I believe scripture teaches that we can pray for these things and that we can seek these things but our prayers for such things should be for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ their purpose should God enable is to confirm the gospel and assist the gospel so that people come to faith in Christ now this is a whole big area that confuses a lot of people and gets a lot of churches mixed up but here we need a very clear purpose of signs and wonders in their relation to the gospel fourth then we need a trusting dependence on God's work verse four this is after the preaching of the gospel as we have seen and then in verse four the people of the city were divided some sided with the

Jews and others with the apostles and I take it that some were opposed but also some believed the same happened in other places look at verse 21 or sorry the end of verse 20 the next day Paul and Barnabas left for Derby verse 21 they preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples now how did that happen how did so many people become followers of Jesus well look at verse 26 from from from Italia they sailed back to Antioch where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed Calvary in just time and what do it say verse 27. On arriving there, they gathered the church together, so everybody perhaps in a meeting just like this, they reported all that God had done through them, and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. That's how people became followers of Jesus. The Gentiles were a Bible-less, church-less, Christ-less bunch of people. They were pagans who were worshipping Zeus and Hermes, but yet they were completely transformed. They came to faith in Christ, a church was formed in their own town, and they began to teach the Bible to each other as they encouraged each other in the faith in all of the opposition. Not because of Paul's power, or because of Barnabas's power. No, it was all because of God's supernatural work. Look at verse 27, the end again. Because it was God who had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. You know what? I can't convince anybody to be a Christian. You can't convince anybody to be a Christian. Your friends, people within your family who you long to turn to

[35 : 42] Christ. You cannot make them a Christian. That's God's work. He alone has the key to open people's hearts. He is the one who locks that bolted, tightened door that enables people to believe and to put their trust in Jesus. He opens the door of faith. And as a church, we exercise our dependence upon this supreme, powerful and awesome God who can cause people to believe. We express our dependence on him by simply telling people the gospel and praying and praying and praying that God will open their hearts so that they trust him.

So here is God's strategy for mission. A mission that we have been called on individually. A mission that we have been called on together as a church. Our risen commander, the Lord Jesus, has given us our assignment until he should come again. Go and preach the gospel to all nations in the power of the Holy Spirit. See churches planted in each and every town and community.

And the way that we can do that together is these four things. Faithfully communicating the gospel. Being prepared for consistent opposition. Having a clear purpose of signs and wonders.

And a trusting dependence on God's work. May that be the case for those who are in Kinsale. May that be the case for us as a church together. And may this spur us on to send people who are even here today to new places and to plant new churches as God calls. Let's pray together.

Our Father God, we thank you for this big picture view of your amazing mission plan and your mission strategy that you would call people like us. This church here in Carragalline to be at the heart of your mission purposes for this world.

[38 : 37] I pray that you would fill us and empower us by your Holy Spirit causing us to be people who speak the good news wherever we are.

that you would raise up and call people out from this church. That we may together send them to be church planters.

That we would get alongside them, praying for them, supporting them and encouraging them. And maybe now just in the quietness.

That we would all surrender our wills, our dreams and our ambitions. That we would surrender them to the mission of God.

Father, bless us as a church.

[39 : 55] use us to the building up of your kingdom and to the fulfilling of your mission. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. We're going to sing.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.