

Acts 14:1–28

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 April 2018

Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 0 0] Now at Iconium, they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.

So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the people of the city were divided, some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles.

When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews with their rulers to mistreat them and to stone them, they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lyconia, and to the surrounding country, and there they continued to preach the gospel.

Now at Lystra, there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul speaking, and Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, Stand upright on your feet.

And he sprang up and began walking. And when the crowd saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lyconian, The gods have come down to us in likeness of men.

[1 : 1 7] Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance of the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowds, crying out, Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who has made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.

In the past generations, he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.

Even with these words, they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them. But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.

But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day, he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through the many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God.

[2 : 5 2] And when they appointed elders for them in every church with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. Then they, passing through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia, and when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Atalia.

From there, they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. And when they had arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And it remained no little time with the disciples. This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated. Thank you.

Well, good morning.

And I'm so glad that you're here with us. And look forward to gathering with you next week at Rockefeller Chapel. My pastor will be preaching.

[4 : 1 0] Kent Hughes, now retired, but still teaching others to preach. And if you've never heard him, he, more than any other preacher, has influenced me both in my person and in my work.

And so I hope that you'll be able to join us next week at Rockefeller Chapel at 3.30. Well, there's nothing quite like a good old-fashioned road trip.

And when I was young, it was impossible to take a road trip without that larger-than-life Rand McNally road map.

If you are too young to be acquainted with those oversized, loose-leaf pages that would take you state by state, in other words, if you've only grown up with the iPhone and are familiar with the paucity of Google Maps, then you're unaware of all that you've missed.

Young people today know how to get anywhere, but they never know where they are. And when you have a Rand McNally road map, you can see the whole thing in front of you.

[5 : 27] Well, when you look at Acts 14, you have, as it were, a road map there. The text has all the makings of a road trip.

Just take a look. You can even see the cities along the way, 14.1 Iconium. Then Lystra, verse 8.

And on from there, all the way down at verse 20, to Derbe. Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.

And you almost have, as it were, inset maps of each of these areas. I mean, they're all listed there for you in verse 6.

This Lystra and Derbe movement. But then as you read the text, it is actually like looking at blown-up versions of incidents that took place both in Lystra and then in Derbe.

[6 : 29] Just so you're aware, as a matter of record, you are traveling in this chapter on the Via Sebas. It is a roadway built by Augustus, completed unlike many of our own roadways, which seemed to never be completed.

This was completed around 6 B.C. It was 20 to 26 feet wide. It would be able to carry wheeled vehicles of Rome in two-directional traffic, as well as walking individuals.

And it started on the northern rim of the Mediterranean and then worked its way north some 100 to 150 miles and over the top of Lake Berder, where it turned into Antioch and Pisidia.

And then from there, another 50 to 60 miles all the way into Lystra, or 80 miles, and then down south and then east again into Derbe.

It was one of the great roadways of the ancient world. And now you are traveling on it with Paul and Barnabas.

[7 : 40] And I want to simply lay out for you today four lessons, one lesson from each of the paragraphs that the editors have given to you. Four lessons for those who today are consciously considering getting on the way with Jesus.

Long before they called the church Christians, they called them followers who were on the way. And here is the roadway, the imperial road, the magnificent road, the great road, as the Via Savast was called.

Four lessons for those considering taking up the journey with Jesus. Or four words for those who have already begun.

First, if you're going to follow Jesus, you're following a message that will play to mixed reviews. Mixed reviews.

Verses 1 through 7. You'll see wonderful things in verse 1. This word on Jesus, spoken, and a great number of people believing.

[8 : 59] But there is the word of contrast in the text. Verse 2, but. You'll see the same word used at verse 4.

But. So the word of Jesus, for those on the way, need to understand from the outset that it will not be universally received.

It's strange because in our day, nobody really has an issue with Jesus. In fact, we speak of liking the way of Jesus.

I mean, who could argue with Jesus? Now the Christians, well that's a different thing. But Jesus is a harmless individual. But if you are going to take up with Jesus, if you are going to get on the road, you need to know that he plays to mixed reviews.

It's interesting here, particularly in those first seven or eight verses, it contrasts the Jews in disobedience or disbelief. Not all Jews, because it says a number of Jews are believing.

[10 : 11] But it should be said then that this monotheistic religion, this one God world of Judaism, had trouble elevating Jesus the Nazarene to the one who did God-like things, who indeed was the son of God.

I think of Jacob Neusner's powerful book, *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus*, written some years ago, imagining a rabbi meeting Jesus at the Sermon on the Mount, and at the end of the day, discovering and discerning whether or not to be his own follower, but going home disappointed, because Jesus made himself equal, even superior to all that the law of Moses could bring. And so this elevation of Jesus to a one greater than Moses, this superior Jesus who alone forgives sins, this one who in last week's message, in verse 38 of the previous chapter, is forgiveness given, and by everyone they are freed from everything which the law of Moses could bring. It will not be universally received. So know this. Get it straight. You want to be a follower of Jesus? Notice, his message will play to mixed reviews. Notice, they're believing in 14.1, but by verse 5, there's an attempt made to stone them. [11:52] That is Paul and Barnabas. Mixed reviews, ready to stone. Second lesson, comes in the fullness of that next paragraph.

We've now made it all the way to Lystra. Not only is it going to play to mixed reviews, but the Christian message is subject to misunderstanding. Notice, that chapter is fascinating the way it ends.

They're wanting to sacrifice oxen to the messengers who have brought this news. Paragraph one, ready to stone.

Paragraph two, wanting to sacrifice to those who bring the message, which is really an indication that the message itself has been misunderstood.

stood. Think of it. The first paragraph, the one God world of Judaism, rejects the message and would stone the messengers.

[13:05] But in this paragraph, the many gods world of the Greeks are initially willing to receive the message and indeed even offer animal sacrifices to those who bring them.

They're in Lystra. Now what's the cause of this misunderstanding? Verses 8 to 11, there is a miracle that took place. In 11 to 13, the misunderstanding is made clear.

And then in verses 15 to the end, it's a message that is given by Paul that clarifies all that's going on. Just briefly look at it for sake of time today.

The miracle, verses 8 to 10, a man who is lame, Paul sees him, looks intently at him, calls out to him, and the consequence is the man is healed right before him.

It is an echo of what Peter did to the man before the beautiful gate at the temple in Acts chapter 3. You remember him.

[14:14] He was there asking for alms. Peter sees him, looks intently at him, tells him, I don't have any money, but what I do have I will give to him.

And he stands and walks and enters into the temple praising God. It is a mirror of Jesus and his own ministry who had the power to actually heal individuals that the lame would walk, which is rooted in the messianic promises of Isaiah that when the Savior comes, there will be a great reversal in play and that the life of futility and disease and sickness and death that we are subject to will be overwhelmed by the goodness and grace of God in his kingdom.

And so Jesus heals the sick, even raises the dead. Peter does the same and now Paul mirroring himself as being absolutely in line with this same ministry.

What's the purpose of these miracles? Well, you can see it wasn't the first one he had done. Look back even at verse 3 of the text. So they remained a long time in Iconium speaking boldly for the Lord and it was the Lord who bore witness to the word of his grace granting signs and wonders to be done by his hands.

The signs and wonders or the miracles that took place according to verse 3 were confirming the word of grace that had gone out.

[15:54] Would you like to know that you can have forgiveness of sins with God? Wholeness, wellness, rightness? The miracles were confirming that word of grace.

But not only that in 2 Corinthians 12 verse 12 you'll see that Paul will mention again that the purpose of miracles didn't only confirm that the word was coming to them of God but it confirmed that the messenger himself had been sent from God.

So miracles are vindicating the message and miracles were validating the apostolic ministry and Paul says to the Corinthian church that the signs were particularly done by the apostles that this was the apostolic seal of approval which is why while we believe that miracles take place today there isn't the necessary gifting that you might have seen with an apostolic work.

Certainly miracles do happen. Certainly we do pray for healing and it occurs at times but it doesn't occur in a way that validates the message in which we have given.

That was for the apostles who actually heard and saw the resurrection and vindicated the message as it was underway. The misunderstanding though comes in verses 11 to 13 after the miracle had been made they didn't think that it was simply confirming the word of God they didn't simply think that these men had come from God they thought that these men were nothing less than the gods dressed in human form disguised in their very midst look what it says in verse 11 when this miracle occurred the people lifted up their voices the gods have come down to us in the likeness of men it's a fascinating moment Barnabas they called Zeus and Paul Hermes well what is this misunderstanding and what is it rooted in you have to know a bit about the

[18:15] Greco-Roman world the the Greeks and the Romans were not a one god people they were a many god people for the Greeks Zeus was think of him as the headmaster at the high table and Hermes was the messenger that did all the bidding which is probably an indication of why they thought Paul was like Hermes and Barnabas like Zeus because Paul was the one speaking Paul was the one delivering the message and so when they see a man healed they begin to think on the pantheon of gods oh my word these are not men before us these are gods disguised as men and they want to sacrifice and pay homage to them there's a

Ovid a Roman writer who lives right around the time of Christ writes a work called Metamorphosis which gives you about 250 myths on the Roman gods because they had their counterparts Hermes and Zeus to the Greeks was nothing less than Jupiter and Mercury to the Romans and there is an indication in Ovid's work that in this very region Jupiter and Mercury disguised themselves and walked among the people and only one elderly couple demonstrated hospitality to them and as a consequence the gods who had been disguised as men flooded the region and wiped out an entire people save that nice elderly couple who demonstrated hospitality what's probably going on here in this text is that the people who believe in many gods are not wanting to make the same mistake twice if the gods have come once and we didn't honor them as gods then

Katie bar the door when these men leave and so they come to them and they say we want to sacrifice to you we want to ensure that we are speaking well of you so the priest there outside the temple of Zeus is running a show with oxen and garlands and the lowing of the animals is coming the crowds verse 13 are rising and suddenly Paul and Barnabas realize this isn't just a festival going by in this pagan city where they believe in a number of gods they are realizing that these animals are going to be sacrificed before them and in honor of them as gods to which they say verse 15 men why are you doing these things we are also men of like nature with you and we bring you good news that you should turn from these vain things to a living god who made the heaven and the earth the sea and all that is in them see the miracle is followed by the misunderstanding and the misunderstanding is followed by the message and the message is simply this there is one god he's the creator of the heavens and the earth in the past verse 16 he let people do their own thing but now that Jesus has come god has put his own son on the throne yet even when he let you go your own way he did not go without a witness verse 17 yet he did not leave himself without witness for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons satisfying your hearts with food and gladness that is the message in a sense a summary very brief summary to what you need to know if you are going to take up with god there's one god he's the creator of the heavens earth he overlooks sin until he provided a substitute for it in his son which then requires all of these individuals to repent or he says you need to turn do you see the language there they are to turn from these vain things these worthless things this is what christianity does if you're going to become a christian today you will have to turn from worthless vain superstitious ways of mediating a relationship with god you don't sit around and knock on wood what is that all about you're not worried about some black cat in the alley as long as the ladder is affixed to the wall you can walk underneath it you don't have to keep certain rules in order for god to be good with you it would be impossible for you to make it that way you need to receive the goodness that he's given and you need to turn from relating to him in any way other than the sacrifice of his son which was made for you now that's just a turning it's always fascinating to me it would be humorous if it wasn't so tragic how many now

Christians are indicating that Jesus is the all accepting one the only loving one the one who would never ask you to turn from anything but merely be embraced by this toothless wonder of a savior the message goes forth here that you have to turn you have to stop bringing your way to God

through vain attempts to appease him in your presence you need to trust instead that what Jesus has done in the shedding of his own blood is sufficient for you and it is to be received by faith you have to turn from these things that's the corrective of the message

God is a creator God is good you must turn put it differently the Christian message overruns not only the one God monotheism of Judaism but it overruns the many God polytheism of the Greco-Roman world in other words if you want to get on the road the imperial road the great road the magnificent highway where there is entrance to heaven it will upend your world view you'll have to change your world view you'll have to begin thinking differently about who God is what God is like how you come to know him and what it means to take up with him I would invite you to that kind of turning this morning it's foolishness to think that you can come to know

[27 : 07] God outside of what he has done for you in his son well mixed reviews don't think you'll come to Jesus and everything's going to be universally received misunderstandings then third many persecutions get this straight before you set out on the imperial way look at verse 19 it's quite stunning but the Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and having persuaded the crowds they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city supposing that he was dead this is quite something because if you came from Iconium well that was about you know 85 to 90 miles to the east of Antioch at Pisidia so these individuals have taken a long run many days on the road to catch up with Paul so agitated they were that he would change their world view and notice they're persuading the crowds that the ones who were just getting ready to sacrifice to them are now stoning them and the only thing that would account for that is that they began to recognize that the message of

Paul had as much import for them as it did the Jews just as the Jews would need to change their entire understanding of God so too Paul had said you have to change entirely what you think about God or how you relate to him and once that began to settle in well they eagerly joined forces many persecutions in fact there's the key word there you'll see it in verse 22 for those who were believing Paul keeps saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God strange bedfellows I think it came to us from Shakespeare lines like the enemy of my enemy is my friend that's what's happening in this text the one

God Judaizers who reject Jesus are politically now aligned with the many God Greco Romans who likewise reject Jesus and while these two groups have very little in common especially what they think about God they will unite to stone Paul lest they have to change their views on God and become a Christian Paul will bring this road map up again in the pastoral epistles 2nd Timothy 3:11 he will tell Timothy you saw the persecutions I endured at Iconium and at Lystra and at Derbe and then he says and you should know that whoever is following Christ is going to be persecuted still want to become a Christian well you should want to become a Christian if it's true and if in its truth it shows you a

God who is good and if in his goodness he's willing to extend to you grace indeed all of that is true and so finally then verse 24 they circle all the way back unbelievably going right back through the towns where they had been persecuted and misunderstood and rejected and they appoint people to lead the church in hostile environments and they set sail and arrive back at home base and they call the church together and they say let me tell you about the missions trip we took and I love I love his upbeat summary verse 27 when they arrived and gathered the church together they declared and here's what I would expect if I put my thumb over the words they declared what a tough trip it had been they declared how people rejected them at every turn they declared that once people knew what they were on about they turned on them they declared that Paul now would bear the marks on his body of being stoned and left for dead they declared

I'm never going on another missions trip again and instead when I lift my thumb I read these words they declared all that God had done with them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles wow well I pray that you will if you're going to follow Jesus have a clear understanding of what you can expect along the way expect things to be mixed expect to be misunderstood expect to gain clarity on what the message is expect many persecutions and expect a summary report of the greatness and the goodness of God my grandfather is dead he's in the ground we buried him in the mountains of

[33 : 05] Colorado as we walked from the house to the cemetery with snow falling on a gravel road with a horse drawn hearse or if not horse drawn I remember open glass to casket buffalo on the fields and his sons leading the walk singing this song we're on the homeward trail we're on the

homeward trail singing as we go going home it's a song that he had sung to them as young children when he was trying to be on the road telling others about Jesus and now though he was dead and placed in the ground the message he proclaimed was still giving life indeed indeed to die for him is gain our heavenly father we we take a look today at this journey and I pray that anyone here who wants to be on the way would know what to expect and anyone who is set out with

Jesus would be encouraged to press on until we enter into the gates of heaven we give ourselves to you with thanksgiving in anticipation of greeting all of our congregations next week to testify to your goodness in Jesus name amen