

The Gospel comes to Iconium

Acts 14:1-7

Sunday morning, January 16, 2011.

Paul and Barnabas have left Antioch in Asia Minor as a result of having been expelled by the leaders of the city. They had shaken the dust from their feet as a testimony especially against the Jews of Antioch

Now they travel some 90 miles east along a Roman Highway that connected Ephesus in the west with Antioch in Syria in the east, (Antioch in Syria was where the sending church of Paul and Barnabas was located.) The distance between Antioch in Asia Minor and Iconium is roughly the same as the distance between New York city and Philadelphia.

Iconium was a sizeable city which also had a mixed population. Located on a major Roman highway in had, besides its own native people (Phrygians), also many Jews and Greeks as well as Roman settlers.

Here Paul and Barnabas chose to preach the gospel next.

Luke is brief in relating what happened in Iconium as so much of it is a repeat of what happened in Antioch of Asia Minor.

I. More of the same.

- A. Paul and Barnabas go first of all to the local Synagogue on the Sabbath day, and as was customarily done, they were given an opportunity to speak there.
- B. The result of Paul's preaching was that a great multitude of the Jews and of the Greeks believed; the Greeks being proselytes and other inquirers.
- C. On the other hand there seem to have been many who did not believe. Once again it is the Jews who take the initiative to stir up opposition to Paul and Barnabas.
- D. They do so by poisoning the minds of the Gentiles against the Apostles. Literally the text reads that they embittered the souls of the Gentiles.
- E. Paul and Barnabas do not leave. Instead they bear the opposition and seek to strengthen the fledgling church in Antioch. Not until a plot comes to light that the Jews are going to stone them (mob justice), do Paul and Barnabas decide to leave.
- F. At this time they go to the cities of Lystra, some 20 miles to the south, and they probably went there first, and from there to Derbe which was some 60 miles to the east in the direction of their sending church in Antioch of Syria.
- G. They seem to be heading back to their home church. They would however return to visit the churches they had founded so far before returning to Antioch in Syria. They would do so to strengthen them in the face of the opposition they faced, and also in order to appoint a government in those churches by way of elders as the end of chapter 14 reveals.

II. The divisive effects of the gospel.

- A. What Luke has related about the effects of the preaching of the gospel so far, as well as what he will show hereafter, shows us that the gospel within the community of believers has a wonderful healing and uniting effect. It does so where ever the message is understood and heeded. The middle wall of separation between Jew and Gentile, and between other classes and races has been broken

down. We all stand as guilty sinners before a holy God, and we all are reconciled to Him by simple faith in Christ.

- B. On the other hand the broader effects of the gospel in the world are that it divides people.
1. In Matthew 10:34-36 the Lord Jesus warned us not to have euphoric expectations of the preaching of the gospel. This warning came in the context of the Lord sending out His disciples to preach the gospel throughout the land of Israel.
“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth; I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.”
 2. The Apostle Paul similarly in writing his second letter to the Corinthians explains: “We are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life.”
2 Corinthians 2:15,16.

Application:

1. Has the line which the gospel draws in peoples’ lives been drawn in your life? Do you know where you stand? I mean the line between this world and the world to come; the line between the realm of darkness and the realm of light, the line between the two masters. Do you try to live on both sides of the line? And how is that working out for you? Have you lost the light and favor and fellowship of your Heavenly Master? It is not too late to return to Him and to let the line be drawn in your life.
2. Have you experienced this line being drawn even in your own family; in your own circle of friends? If so do not count that a strange thing. The realm of darkness will not willingly yield to the realm of light. Have you experienced opposition and hostility as a result of this line being drawn in your life? Paul and Barnabas returned to the cities they had preached in to strengthen the souls of the believers in the face of opposition. “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” Acts 14:22.

III. Divine help.

- A. For some time the Apostles were able to stay in Iconium despite the opposition to strengthen the souls of the brethren. This was God’s mercy to them; they were not left like orphans.
- B. God granted many signs and wonders to be done by the Apostles, bearing witness to the truthfulness of their message. Thus they were encouraged to cling to the Lord and the gospel.
- C. Isaiah says that “When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him.” Isaiah 59:19.
- D. Paul and Barnabas would revisit them, appointing elders in their churches to care for them.

Application:

When the enemy comes into your life like a flood as a result of the gospel line being drawn in your life, look for the standard the Spirit of God is raising up against him.