

Series: "Church the Way It's Supposed to Be"

Sermon #12

"More Trouble"

Acts 14

Introduction: We usually identify the preaching of the gospel with the quiet rural villages of Palestine where the Lord Jesus ministered. For this reason, many Christians are surprised to learn that the church in the book of Acts was almost entirely *urban*. Historian Wayne A. Meeks writes that "*within a decade of the crucifixion of Jesus, the village culture of Palestine had been left behind, and the Greco-Roman city became the dominant environment of the Christian movement*" (*The First Urban Christians*, 11).

Last Week:

1. **Antioch in Syria**—Decision (13:1–5)
2. **Paphos**—Deception (13:6–12)
3. **Perga**—Desertion (13:13)
4. **Antioch in Pisidia**—Disputation (13:14–52)

Iconium—Division (14:1–7)

This city, more Greek than Roman, was in the Roman province of Galatia. Paul's ministry in the synagogue was singularly blessed and a multitude of Jews and Gentiles believed. Once again, the unbelieving Jews stirred up hatred and opposition, but the missionaries stayed on and witnessed boldly for Christ.

(Note the "*therefore*" in vs. 3.) God also enabled the men to perform signs and wonders as their "*credentials*" that they were indeed the servants of the true God (Acts 15:12; Gal. 3:5; Heb. 2:4). Faith is not based on miracles (Luke 16:27–31; John 2:23–25), but faith can be bolstered by miracles. The important thing is "*the word of his grace*" that performs the *work* of His grace (Acts 14:26).

The result? The city was **divided** and the Christians were threatened with public disgrace and stoning. Obedient to their Lord's counsel in Matthew 10:23, they fled from that area into a different Roman district and continued to minister the Word of God.

Lystra—Delusion (14:8–20)

Lystra was in the Roman province of Galatia, about 18 miles southwest of Iconium. This was the first of three visits Paul made to this city.

On his second missionary journey, Paul enlisted Timothy in Lystra (Acts 16:1–5), and he made a visit to this church on his third journey as well (Acts 18:23). We should note **FOUR Different Responses** during this visit.

The Crippled Man's Response To The Word (vv. 8–10). Both Peter and Paul healed men who were lame from birth (Acts 3).

The Crowd's Response To The Crippled Man (vv. 11–13). Miracles by themselves do not produce either conviction or faith. They must be accompanied by the Word (Acts 14:3). This was a superstitious crowd that interpreted events in the light of their own mythology. They identified Barnabas as Jupiter (Zeus), the chief of the gods; and Paul, the speaker, they identified with Mercury (Hermes), the messenger of the gods.

The Apostles' Response To The Crowd (vv. 14–19). How easy it would have been to accept this worship and try to use the honor as a basis for teaching the people the truth, but that is not the way God's true servants minister (2 Cor. 4:1–2; 1 Thess. 2:1–5). Paul and Barnabas opposed what they were doing and boldly told the people that the gods of Lystra were "vanities."

The Disciples' Response To Paul (v. 20). There were new believers in Lystra, and this was a crisis situation for them. They were a minority, their leader had been stoned, and their future looked very bleak. But they stood by Paul! It is likely that they joined hearts and prayed for him, and this is one reason God raised him up. Was Paul dead? We are not told. This is the only stoning he ever experienced (2 Cor. 11:25), but from it came glory to God. It may have been this event that especially touched Timothy and eventually led to his association with Paul (2 Tim. 3:10).

Antioch in Syria—Declaration (14:21–28)

On their return trip to Antioch, the missionaries were engaged in several important ministries.

First, they preached the gospel and made disciples (“taught many”). It is difficult to understand how they got back into the cities from which they had been expelled, but the Lord opened the doors.

Second, they strengthened (“confirmed”) the believers in the things of Christ and encouraged (“exhorted”) them to continue in the faith. Continuance is a proof of true faith in Jesus Christ (John 8:31–32; Acts 2:42). Paul made it very clear that living the Christian life was not an easy thing and that they would all have to expect trials and sufferings before they would see the Lord in glory.

Third, they organized the churches (Acts 14:23–25). The local church is both an organism and an organization, for if an organism is not organized, it will die! Paul and Barnabas ordained spiritual leaders and gave them the responsibility of caring for the flock. If you compare Titus 1:5 and 7, you will see that “elder” and “bishop” (overseer) refer to the same office, and both are equivalent to “pastor” (shepherd).

The word translated *ordained* means “to elect by a show of hands.” It is possible that Paul chose the men and the congregation voted its approval, or that the people selected them by vote and Paul ordained them (Acts 6:1–6). Finally, they reported to their “sending church” on the work God had done (Acts 14:26–28). This is perhaps the first “missions conference” in church history, and what a conference it must have been!

It takes the local church to fulfill all of what Jesus commanded us to do. He grounded the believers in the Word of God. This is the only source of strength and stability when persecution comes, as it inevitably does come. Paul did not preach a popular “success gospel” that painted a picture of an easy Christian life. The amazing thing is that Paul and his associates did all of this without the modern means of transportation and communication that we possess today.

Dr. Bob Pierce used to say to us in *Youth for Christ*, “Others have done so much with so little, while we have done so little with so much!”