

2/4/24 - Acts 14:1-28 - "Toto, we're not in Kansas anymore"

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[0 : 00] We'll be reading today from Acts chapter 14. It's page 923 in the Pew Bible if you want to follow along. Starting in verse 1 of chapter 14.

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.

[1 : 24] 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 the likeness of men.

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 crowd, crying out, Men, why are you doing these things? We also are 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 and the sea and all that is in them. In 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.

[2 : 36] 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 the 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 many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

And when they had appointed elders for them in every church with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. Then they passed through Poseidon and came to Pamphylia.

And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. And from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God, for the work they had fulfilled.

And when they 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 they remained no little time with the disciples.

[3 : 51] This is the word of the Lord. Amen. Amen indeed. It's great to be here with you today on this wonderful Sunday.

We have some tired folks working on proposals for engineering proposals. We have people working all night long. And like myself, I could have probably lasted about four more hours in bed when the alarm went off at 5 a.m.

from our whole houses barking like dogs with sickness. So, it's just going around. And so, we're all in it together. And it is great to come to be strengthened by the word of God, as it were for the towns all throughout this region.

And such a long journey of a passage that we have today, but I'm really hoping that we're able to break it down together. Today, we're going to pack our bags and prepare ourselves for a pilgrimage across the ends of the earth.

And the gospel is spreading throughout this region in the ends of this earth. And this is a trip that we'll call a pilgrimage. And so, if you don't mind, we'll just call ourselves pilgrims today as we travel with these men in this strange land.

[5 : 20] And within the text today, we find a road map that's laid out before us, just like those old-style road maps that you lay out, you know, the paper road maps, whether it's folded up into 20 folds and put into your glove box like we took road trips down to Florida with, or if you've printed it out with MapQuest.

If you don't know what that is, you're missing out on real trips. But I'll tell you, we've got a whole generation that has GPS in their hands. They know exactly where they're going, but they have no idea where they are.

And we've got to ask, where are we going? Where are we at in the passage? And where are we at in this journey? So last week, we were in Pisidia, Pisidia of Antioch, Antioch of Pisidia, however you want to say it.

And it dealt with the people who were known as the insiders, remember, in their subdivisions, living lavishly, right? Doing all the works to get to where they are, and that is the Jewish people, the insiders.

And it led to the dismissal of Paul and Barnabas last week. They dismissed the message, they dismissed the men, they ultimately dismissed the Messiah. And they just didn't want to hear about it.

[6 : 37] And on this pilgrimage, as we're good little pilgrims, we are taken by our trustworthy concierge, Luke, as he is the author of this map quest.

And he will serve as our concierge through this trip. And across this trip, we will find ourselves with two questions that will prod our hearts with each destination that we arrive at.

The first question being, where might God's mission be leading us? And the second question, how might we be reluctant to follow?

And those two questions will press in upon a main point, which is that God's mission will lead us to strange lands doing the same task of preaching the gospel.

And so let's join in with our concierge, Luke, as he takes us from Pisidia to Iconium, to Lystra, and to Derb, and return back with these two missionaries, Paul and Barnabas, to Antioch, as Paul concludes his first missions trip.

[8 : 01] Father, I'd invite you to get on the road with me to those strange lands at the ends of the earth. These foreign lands. And for that, we have a sermon titled, Toto, we're not in Kansas anymore.

I'd ask you to pray with me as we enter in. Father, whose law is perfect, converting the soul, assure testimony, giving wisdom to the unlearned, and enlightening the eyes.

Father, we humbly implore you through your boundless goodness to enlighten our blind intellect by your Holy Spirit so that we may truly understand and profess your law and live according to it.

Since it has pleased you, most merciful Father, to reveal the mysteries of your will only to the little ones. And since you took to him alone who is of a humble and contrite spirit, who has reverence for your word, grant us a humble spirit and keep us from all fleshly wisdom, which is in enmity against you.

Bring to us the right way those who stray from the truth so that we all may unanimously serve you in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life.

[9 : 35] We ask this from you, most merciful Father, in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Amen. So I have three sections that we will break out relating to three destinations that our concierge is telling us to pay attention to.

Each destination will serve those two questions reinforcing that main point. So let's look at the first one, the outreach to insiders, borrowing from the illustration from last week, outreach to insiders in Iconium.

And that goes from verse 1 to 7. Verse 1, Luke writes, 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.

So Paul and Barnabas, in verse 1, are after being driven out of Pisidia, make their way east to Iconium, which is an interesting city which is divided into four different regions, all representing four different Greek gods.

And I think that's interesting because they still, even with all the mess and circus going on around, they still enter the synagogue. They enter the temple of insiders.

[11 : 03] And so they enter in. And verse 2, it begins with a similar episode with Pisidia. Delivering more sermons, there's more conversions, people are coming to faith in verse 2.

But the truth of the gospel was again rejected. It was received with opposition as unbelieving Jews became active agents against the good news of Jesus Christ.

And I would have imagined that in verse 2, it probably would have ended the mission strip right there. And they'd just be on to the next city.

But look with me in verse 3. The most unimaginable thing occurred. They remained for a long time. A long time meaning probably around a year in time.

They didn't just hide in the shadows of this area. They boldly proclaimed. They bore witness.

[12 : 06] Church, do you see, that they dug their heels in. A pagan city. In a confrontation with the Jewish people.

Iconium thought they had it all together. They got their Greek gods. The Jewish people got their temple. What would Paul and Barnabas ever have to offer to them?

Well, they were a conglomeration of worshipful confusion. Worshiping in their own way. According to their own desires. As their heart led.

According to their tradition. And ultimately, it was all a conglomeration of worship. But it was worshipful rebellion against the living God. And in verse 3, during these times, God would reinforce that these guys were not just characters coming into the city with just any other message.

He verified the message with signs and wonders to reinforce their authority as messengers to testify to the unbelieving Jews who would never believe unless they saw those signs.

[13 : 21] And now, it's not saying that I would make a prescription of signs and wonders as an evangelistic tool to take with you over to your next missions trip or anything.

But I believe that it's a description of how God validated that message in these times. How He reinforced the authority of the apostles going from city to city.

Now, after all, if signs and wonders are to have to do with anything, it actually is not flattering when people ask Jesus Himself for a sign and a wonder.

Was it? It was actually a testimony of their unbelief of needing signs and wonders. So we need to adjust our theology according to redemptive history, progressive revelation, and how God was laying the foundation of the church according to Luke's concierge on this trip.

Saying, this is how God did it. And so let's look at verse 4. How things turned out. Verse 4, when they came to...

[14 : 31] I'm sorry, here. Verse 4 of chapter 14, not 15. But the people of the city were divided. Some sided with the Jews and some sided 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 Derb, cities of Lyconia into the surrounding country.

And so, the gospel simply divided people. The gospel unites, but the gospel also divides. It's sharper than a two-edged sword. It cuts any which way that it is delivered.

And this ultimately led to death threats. That escalated quickly, didn't it? And so as we look at this mission in Iconium, at the boldness and the steadfastness of Paul and Barnabas to stay, but also wisdom when to know when to wrap things up and to go, it asks us a question on this trip.

Where might God's mission be leading you? How might you be reluctant to follow? What strange land might you be led to? What strange land might you be in right now?

[16 : 06] It makes us kind of question at times if God might be calling you to endure a year's worth of opposition and dig your heels into an unfathomable situation, right?

It might be calling you to endure a year's worth of tribulation, a year's worth of opposition, a year's worth of rejection to dig your heels in.

And might you be in turmoil over the fact about the fact that you really want to leave because things are hard, but God is calling you to stay.

But even on the flip side, might God be calling you to retreat, to leave, to pack up from a season of gospel investments, to leave it all behind?

And might you then be in turmoil about the fact that you really want to stay, you really want to reap the fruits of your investments, but God is calling you to go?

[17 : 14] Well, as the main point of these questions till the soil of our hearts, might we be reminded that it is not about us and what we want, church.

It's about what God requires. Strange lands all having the same task.

You see, in verse 7, that same task is observed in the city. Don't lose sight of the mission. They continued in verse 7 to preach the gospel there.

There. Salvation comes by no other way. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing the word of what church? Christ. Romans 10, 17.

It's uncomfortable. At times, it's unrewarding, and rejection is unending. But as we see through Paul and Barnabas, the word carried on.

[18 : 21] Will we as well? And so with that question prodding our hearts, let's follow our concierge Luke to Lystra, about 18 miles away, and observe how the mission continues there.

And so we see in the second section, outreach to outsiders in Lystra. In verse 8 through 10, there's a miracle.

The miracle that it seems like we've seen before. If you've been plugged into this series since chapter 3 in the book of Acts, this incident might sound familiar.

Paul enters in, sees person who is in need, physically in need, crippled, since birth, looks intently at him, tells him to walk.

His faith made him well. Within this public square in the Gentile city, in Lystra, we have a parallel story to the incident with Peter in Acts 3, 1-10.

[19 : 39] Both of the men sitting before the apostles were disabled from birth. Both of the men who were sitting along the pathway of these apostles, it was their faith that made them well.

Both the apostles who came upon the disabled person looked at them intently where they stood in their place. Now, there are quite a bit of parallels, but there's contrast as well.

The significance of these parallels is observed in their ability to verify the message of the gospel. You have the miracle and then you have something that happens right after that miracle that we forget about so often.

It's called context and it's very important when we read and study and know who God is and how He does things. He verifies the message of the gospel both in Peter's incident and this incident.

And this is happening in a strange land of the unknown. This is not Kansas anymore, Toto. This is strange land, Greek gods, weird stuff.

[20 : 56] And in Acts 3, the insiders back with Peter, the insiders were annoyed in Peter chapter 4 verses 2. But in Lystra, the audience, the outsiders were astonished.

The miracle of Peter brought nuisance to the insiders, but it brought astonishment to these outsiders. So while they are similar, they are contrasted, and I believe that is significant as we'll see the situation unfold.

In verse 11, it says, And when the crowd saw what Paul had done, they lifted their voices saying, in Lyconian, the gods have come down to us in the likeness of men.

No. No amen on that. 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.

Remember, these apostles, these men, these messengers, essentially, came into the city, healed a disabled man, didn't say a word about Jesus, and they were praising the works of the miracle, thinking that Paul and Barnabas were gods.

[22 : 30] There is no amen into that situation indeed, at all. There was mass confusion. There was utter confusion. And this near comical scene is playing out.

It taps into Greek mythological folklore of Zeus being, you know, the ultimate god. He's the strongest, lower G, god, and he's the sky father.

And Hermes, the god, lower G, god who governs speech. And according to Greek mythology, the last time these two gods visited their people, they were rejected by their people.

And so, what did Zeus and Hermes do? They drowned Lystra. They drowned Lystra. These are strange lands, church. For the Gentiles, this is a moment to make things right.

It's Zeus. We got a second chance. It's Hermes. We got another chance, guys. Let's do this right. So, you got the priest of Zeus coming out of his little hut with the goat and the garland.

[23 : 47] They're creating this parade coming down the road. Now's the time. Now's the time. But for these messengers, it wasn't a time to make things right.

It was a time to make things clear. So, they opened their mouths. In verse 14, but when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd.

Notice the urgency. In verse 15, they cry 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 made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.

What this miracle did for Peter was ushering in a bold proclamation of the gospel to the insiders and what this miracle did here is usher in a bold proclamation of the gospel to outsiders.

But how does Paul do it here? They don't know the Old Testament like Peter's audience. They don't have a scroll. I mean Paul couldn't go to his theology books up in his room back at home.

[25 : 28] He couldn't start out well the God of Abraham, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and begin you know in the English accent. You have to have an English accent whenever you impersonate people from the Bibles.

Have you not known? Well he tries, he basically here adapts the message to the audience. This is so profound here.

What does he go to? He doesn't go to all of this heritage and lineage and who Jesus was. He goes to their rejection through natural revelation.

Things that are perceivable because they're Greek people who worshipped Greek gods. mythological gods. The sky and the sea they worshipped.

He turns to something they understand. Natural revelation. Common grace of God. Air in your breath kind of adaptation.

[26 : 31] And that there is a God greater than all of their gods. Right? And so prodding at their hearts, Paul hits not only their rejection of the highest and worthy deity, but also at their sinful rebellion.

Look with me at verse 16. It has little dingers going off back there. Verse 16, in past generations, he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways.

He doesn't go to the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. He goes to sin. Verse 16, in past generations, he allowed all nations to walk in their own ways.

Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good. A loving God, he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.

In other words, you need to change your theology. You need to change your theology of how you're doing this because you're doing it wrong.

[27 : 46] The path that they walked is something that Paul elaborates years later in the book of Romans, in Romans 1, 18-32, where man has traded worship of the Creator and is worshiping created things.

What happens next? He didn't even get to the gospel yet. The processional continues. In verse 18, look with me.

Even with these words, they were scarcely restrained. They scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them. They're chopping up animals. They don't care about what's going on, what he's saying.

Isn't that just a snapshot of sometimes when we address the world of sin in our day today? They don't got a problem.

You're there to enhance their life. Right? They didn't want to hear it in verse 18. In fact, it gets worse. We see that the villagers certainly have come.

[29 : 01] The Jews from the subdivision in Pisidia and Iconium arrived at Lystra. They turned the city against them. The people clenched stones in their hands.

They stoned Paul. Now, Paul was so severely hurt that they thought he was dead. they tossed his body out of the city like a rag doll.

He was bloody bruised and broken. Supposing he was dead. I think it's important to note that the supposing here, I've looked into it this week and I don't believe that he was actually dead.

because the word supposing always is applied and indicates that it's an inaccurate supposition. Like, they thought but they fooled you.

But to God's grace he guided Paul out of that city, out of that trouble, by God's providence and God's hand. You see, while Paul and Barnabas were not in Jerusalem anymore, they're in this wacky city, this strange land, but guess what?

[30 : 31] The same task. They certainly remained on mission as verse 21 concludes in this city. When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch.

And so as the mission and missionaries stay on course, its rawness ought to challenge us. This is a tough scene. It's a tough reality as we ask, where might God's mission be leading us?

And how might we be reluctant to follow? Well, I can tell you straight up, I'd probably get the first flight home after experiencing this.

I mean, there's less things that will keep us from going to work in the morning. A sore throat.

And Paul, as horrific as stoning can be, I mean, that's broken bodies hurt. They continue. The mission. This isn't calling for a radical form of Christianity, but it is calling for a wake-up call to the seriousness of the mission.

[31 : 51] I mean, we'd be on our flight home, wouldn't we? If we want to be honest. We would avoid this danger. We wouldn't be pressing on. We'd look for those excuses. We'd bring the doctor's note back to Jerusalem, saying, I got a doctor's note.

I got to cash in. I'm retiring early. That's it. I mean, after all, after Peter's speech, if you want to look at parallels, in Peter's speech in Acts 3, it produced 5,000 followers of Jesus Christ.

After Paul's speech, we could argue it produced 5,000 band-aids, 5,000 sutures.

Regardless of the message being misunderstood, the malice against them, the message continued. And church, the road God has for us will certainly challenge our perseverance.

Amen? And it often will stretch our faith. It'll stretch our trust. It'll stretch our belief as we endure.

[33 : 07] And so, they make their way back. They're wrapping up the missions, trip. They finished in Derb, and now they're making their way back.

And in verse 21, as we saw them finishing their missions trip, we see that they're now creating outreach to churches. They make this swing back through various places that they were rejected, but churches were established.

established. The next city where they were rejected, and lo and behold, churches were established. In verse 21, it says, when they had preached the gospel in that city, related to Derb, and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra.

That was probably fun, right? a little trauma revisit, and back to Iconium, another trauma revisit, back to Pisidia, another trauma revisit, all the way back to Antioch.

what did they do, though? What did this outreach look like? They were strengthening the souls of the disciples in verse 22.

[34 : 24] They encouraged them to continue in the faith, saying that through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God. In verse 23, and when they had appointed elders for them in every church with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

I think our tendency in our day-to-day is to think of outreach as something that we do outside of the building, sort of like missions trips and things of that nature.

But don't forget that Steel Valley Church, and every church for that matter, but Steel Valley Church is a fruit of a missions trip long ago.

And if you want to get real, Steel Valley Church is indeed a strange land among them all, but with the same task.

City after city on their way home. What did they do? They testified to the work that God had been guiding them down a path of tribulation, a little bit of a wake-up call to some people.

[35 : 44] And rather than telling the followers to run for their lives, the villagers are coming. The insiders from Lystra and Iconium and all these Greeks are chasing them on their goats with garlands.

They're coming! Run! Run! Paul tells them to assemble, to be ready, and to be strong.

How does he do it? Verse 23, appointing elders to carry on the task of discipling, the apostolic work of heralding the gospel message in these areas.

In other words, the church began to be established here. Luke, within his context of even writing, he's writing to Theophilus back in chapter 1, who wanted to know how this whole thing fits together.

You want to know how it fits together? It fits together solely by the proclamation and the good news of Jesus Christ. That is how it's put together.

[36 : 56] And you thought you were leisurely just visiting Steel Valley Church today, like checking out that cool stone church on the corner. I'm glad that you're here today, but this is just no ordinary church.

God did not just create and establish any ordinary churches. He established an army, an assembly that testifies to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Strange lands, but with the same task. And Paul and Barnabas returned home and called for a special church service, summarizing their entire mission strip. In verse 27, they gathered the church in Antioch.

This is the very first point before they went to Cyprus. Antioch, not Pisidia Antioch, this is Antioch, Antioch. In verse 27, and when they arrived and gathered the church there, they declared all that God had done with them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

Strange people, a strange mission in strange lands. In verse 28, and they remained no little time with the disciples.

[38 : 12] Paul didn't get back to Antioch and say, guys, look what I endured. Look at me. Look at all these bandages and bruises.

As if to rob God of the glory on this mission's trip. No. He summarized the mission's trip as that God had opened a door that had once been closed.

Closed to all Gentiles. He has opened that door. How? By faith in Jesus Christ. And so with the final challenge, where might God's mission be leading us?

How might we be reluctant to follow? Well, looking at the context and the emphasis of his return back to Antioch, the outreach to churches, sometimes the greatest mission he has for us is simply going to church.

It simply will lead us to a church gathering. Gathering together for the sole purpose of proclamation, preservation, and of defense of the gospel.

[39 : 31] That is why we gather. That is why we exist. We are the fruits of a mission's trip long ago. And so as we ask throughout this time today, where might God's mission be leading us?

How might we be reluctant to follow? Well, the central argument as summarized at the ends of each location has everything to do with the preaching of the gospel.

The word work is central to the church's mission. The main point of it all is that God's mission will lead us to strange lands doing the same task of preaching the gospel.

And so what strange land are you in today? Or where might God be leading you? Iconium and Lystra are not only geographical locations, friends.

They're not just pins on a map, but they're theological realities in our minds. Places that represent locations God may take us to.

[40 : 45] That we may be rejected. We may be bruised and beaten, broken. We may be challenged. We may be chased out.

We may be received as gods. And we may not know where God is leading, but we certainly know the work that needs to be done.

Amen? So for the church amid it all, the word work remains central and it is carried out city to city to save, to strengthen, to encourage, to entrust, and for elders to do the task of assembling the church and guarding the gospel and to send again.

There is work to be done, friends, church members. Great work to be done. It is not a time for slothfulness. It is not a time to be lazy or make excuses. Verse 28 makes that clear.

And they remain no little time with the disciples. I would have cashed in everything. I would turn my passports in and all and just chilled out there. Took in retirement.

[42 : 04] Bought a yacht. Sailed around Cyprus. So just as there is with any question that we ask in the text today, there is an invitation. You are invited to this urgent work of the gospel.

Every one of you is invited to that urgent work. And so I ask you to join me. Regardless of the strangeness of the land, will we devote ourselves to the same task?

Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.