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October 27, 2019
Grace Enabled Endurance
Acts 14:1-7

14 The same thing happened in Iconium. Paul and Barnabas entered the Jewish synagogue and spoke as they had before. As a result, a huge number of Jews and Greeks believed. ² However, the Jews who rejected the faith stirred up the Gentiles, poisoning their minds against the brothers. ³ Nevertheless, Paul and Barnabas stayed there for quite some time, confidently speaking about the Lord. And the Lord confirmed the word about his grace by the signs and wonders he enabled them to perform. ⁴ The people of the city were divided—some siding with the Jews, others with the Lord’s messengers. ⁵ Then some Gentiles and Jews, including their leaders, hatched a plot to mistreat and stone Paul and Barnabas. ⁶ When they learned of it, these two messengers fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and the surrounding area, ⁷ where they continued to proclaim the good news.

I have good news for you. Yes, Jesus is our Savior, but also, we are nearly half way through the book of Acts. I am excited and empowered by what I am learning as we faithfully read through this book together. If you think of this book as the Acts of the Holy Spirit, then we are not even close to half way because the Holy Spirit is still in action today.

One reason I truly enjoy preaching from one book is that we are not just picking or proof-texting, but are reading verse by verse, chapter after chapter. I probably would never choose to preach from chapter 13 or chapter 14th. When you stop, reflect and pray, you realize anew that all Scripture is inspired by God and useful for our lives. The Bible opens the riches of God’s grace and mercy for you and me in our present time.



Last week we left Paul and Barnabas shaking the dust off their feet and leaving Pisidian Antioch. What would you do knowing that your “preaching” would most likely

not be accepted and welcomed? Did not Paul and Barnabas realize that a similar fate awaited them in the next city?

It did not matter to them. They knew that Jesus went about preaching, teaching and healing and ended up being crucified. If that happened to our Lord whom we worship and imitate, then why should we be dismayed if our following him leads us to troubles?

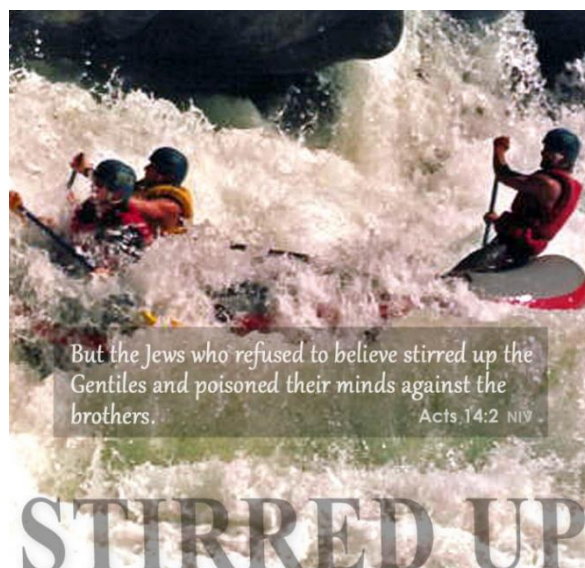
So let us follow these two guys about 100 miles southeast to Iconium. They went to the synagogue to preach. Observe how true it was then and how true it is now: When the gospel is proclaimed, there are two types of reaction: you will get excited and it will bring joy to you **or** you will get angry and frustrated by what you are hearing. According to Hebrews: “The word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires”.

Many of us do not want our secret thoughts and desires brought to the light. Others find healing in honestly and earnestly seeking God’s love and forgiveness.

The Word of God will either convince us or harden us. Truth divides. In Luke 12 Jesus says, “Do you suppose that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, No. I bring division.” That does not mean we should be deliberately divisive. Truth – Jesus called himself the truth – by its very nature demands that we make a decision. You either accept it or reject it.

We have the truth of the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures, the deity of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, salvation by faith alone. There is no neutrality in our response to God’s truth.

Paul and Barnabas preached the word of God and “As a result, a huge number of Jews and Greeks believed. ² However, the Jews who rejected the faith stirred up the Gentiles, poisoning their minds against the brothers.”



Many Jews and Greeks believed, but, of course, there was a group who, not only rejected the gospel, but started to plot ways to stop these missionaries. They stirred the pot by poisoning the minds of people.

Many times I hear or see something and I can feel my emotions rising up. Too often I let my emotions speak before I reflect and let my mind to be united in prayer with God. My girls will make mistakes on a test. I get upset.

Somebody disagrees with me. My emotions scream at me to attack, to protect, to prove. When emotions are positive it can usually bear good fruit. I am still such a learner in a beginners course. How do you keep silent when your emotions are stirred up, especially in a negative way?

I hope I am improving, but how guilty I am of sharing my negativity with others. I am also guilty of hearing somebody else share their negativity and letting it influence me. I think an event was great or a person did well, but somebody comes along and says: "Oh, wasn't that a horrible meeting, bad speech, bad performance, bad food." The most dangerous poisoning is when we speak about other believers in a negative fashion. What poisons my mind? These Jews started to speak badly about Paul and Barnabas convincing others to think the same way and join in their violence.

A large number of Jews enthusiastically welcomed the Good News of Jesus Christ. A few Jews refused to believe. They did not like what they heard, talked to others and poisoned their minds.

Our minds can be affected for good or evil. Spiritual warfare is battle for our minds. You do not do an evil deed or a good, selfless, noble deed which was not first conceived in your mind. You do not speak discouraging and evil words or words of comfort and encouragement until you first think them in your mind.

No one turns to God without first making a decision in her or his mind about the truth.

That is why it is so important for youth, as well as adults, to be careful which friends we hang out with. The Bible says, "Do not be deceived: bad company corrupts good character. (I Cor. 15:33).

Be cautious of what philosophies and ideas you buy into. Weigh them carefully against God's Word. What movies and TV shows and books and music are influencing our thinking? How about Facebook or Twitter?

Psalms 1 begins with "Blessed (happy) is the person who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the road with sinners. But takes delight in the law of the Lord and meditates on that law day and night."

Computer programmers use the phrase: Garbage in, garbage out. In other words, if you put bad information into the computer you will get a useless printout. If you fill your head with trash, how can you be surprised by the bad that results?

Philippians 4:8 tells us: “Finally, brothers and sister, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”

These two missionaries, Paul and Barnabas, decided to stay for a long time and continue to speak boldly about the Lord, Jesus. How many times do we just want to quit?

One day I decided I wanted to climb the 3,000-foot-high Deer Mountain near Ketchikan, Alaska. The 3-mile trail is difficult and steep with large rocks and tree roots to climb over. The first two miles you see nothing but thick forest and the next obstacle to overcome. I started out with enthusiasm. Before long I was tired and sore. I asked, “How much further?” My father-in-law laughed. “We are 16% of the way.” As much as I wanted, my pride would not let me turn around with a man twice my age going up with me.



Do you feel unappreciated? Do you attract too much opposition? Do too many people hurt you? You might just want to quit. I cannot recall wanting to quit being a pastor. I remember very clearly that I wanted to quit seminary. I have wanted to quit some ministries. Paul and Barnabas stayed and continued to boldly preach about God's grace.

Because they hung in there through the tough times and because they continued to be brave proclaiming God's grace, God granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. It agitated even more those who wanted them to get out and stop preaching. I think what really got to those who rejected Paul was his preaching about grace. We wonder how anyone can be upset about God's grace?

I enjoy Starbucks coffee. I go there for special occasions. You buy a cup of coffee and you get a few stars. I have been collecting stars so I can get my free cup of coffee. It has been a year now and I still have not collected enough stars to get that cup of coffee. It would be frustrating if somebody would get a free cup of coffee without collecting all these stars?



Maybe you are earning frequent flyer miles so you can use them to get a free flight. Think how unfair it would be if your neighbor would get a free flight just because ... without using or collecting his miles!

Paul and Barnabas are saying you do not need to collect stars or miles to be saved. They are saying your sins are forgiven by the free gift of God grace to all who put their trust in our crucified and risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

Many of you learned Ephesians 2:8-9 in the King James Version. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." Listen to how the Living Bible puts it: "Because of God's kindness, you have been saved through trusting Christ. And even trusting is not of yourselves; it too is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good we have done, so none of us can take any credit for it."

Think from a Jew's perspective. You have lived by all the commandments. Your life is set differently. You faithfully sacrifice. You do all the work that is required by your religion. Now Paul says, "All people...by grace" Isn't that unfair! All, by Grace.

I love grace for me. There would be no problem if Starbucks would give me a free coffee without collecting those stars for years. I love grace for me -- that I am accepted for who I am, I do not have to achieve, I do not have to be a somebody in my life, to receive kindness. I want grace for me, but not for them. If I need to collect the stars, I think it is fair that others will have to do the same. The ones who hate grace the most are the self-righteous. Am I one of them?

Recently in Bible study we talked about the parable of the workers. Some worked all day in the heat and in the sun and others worked just a few hours. What happened in the end? How did the land owner pay? Equally to all. Would you be happy if you were that last person and got paid the same as others? Would you be happy to experience the goodness and grace of the land owner? But we are so not ok if we are the ones who worked very hard all day.

Today is Reformation Sunday. The Reformation began over 500 years ago with people like Martin Luther who protested the practices of the Roman Catholic Church. That is why we are called Protestants. Did you know that because of Martin Luther we sing hymns in church? Up until then it was against the church law. He wrote many hymns. The most well-known is "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

Martin Luther and other reformers emphasized the importance of preaching and reading the Scriptures. A brilliant scholar, Martin Luther did the first translation of the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into German.

Martin Luther was kicked out of the church because he understood that it is only by faith that you are saved. You cannot earn your salvation. Like those Jews who heard Paul and Barnabas, the religious people did not want to hear this message of God's grace.

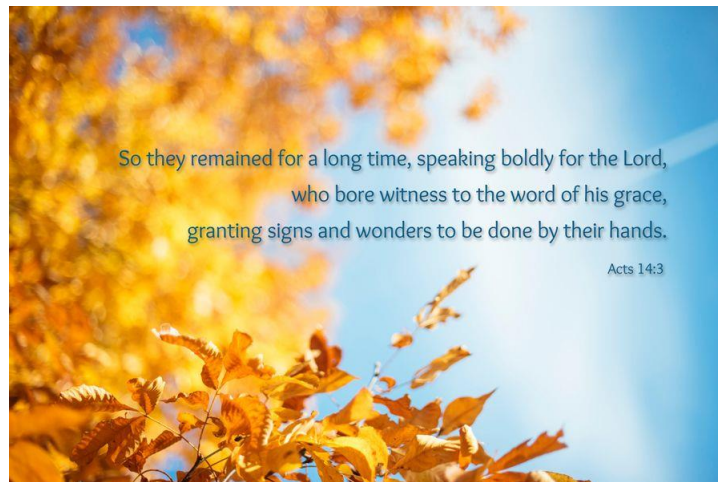
When Paul preached about God's grace, God confirmed that grace by granting signs and wonders.

God's Word, God's Grace and signs go hand in hand. These signs were also acts of God's grace. It is always God who initiates and God who always has a purpose for signs and miracles which is that everyone would believe in Him and be saved. Paul and Barnabas were not strong from their own strength. They relied on God's strength. God did miracles through them because they were dependent on God.

Soon verbal opposition turned into physical threats. Jews and Gentiles plotted to stone Paul and Barnabas. Paul and Barnabas are bold and brave, but not stupid. They learned what the plans were and they escaped. There is no mention of them being afraid.

They traveled on south to Lystra and Derbe. The word of God spread and the grace of God stayed in those who received it.

Today we will be able to witness and experience God's grace through baptism. I loved meeting and preparing for Pat's baptism. What a joy and blessing it has been for me to participate in Pat's journey with Christ. In God's own timing and God's own ways,



God calls us all to say. "Yes." We, as a church, have the privilege of witnessing new birth, new life and a new sister in Christ. I invite you to remember your baptism, to remember God's grace toward you and to share the same grace with others.