

“The Sending Church – Part Two”

Acts 14

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Intro. Acts 14

I hope it's been a good week for you. If you are a guest here to Champion Forest, many of us have been on a week-long journey with the Lord. We asked our entire church to at some point this week fast and pray. As a church and as individuals that make up this church:

- We want to go deeper in our walk with God...
- We want to experience him at a deeper level...
- We want to grow closer to him...

And at times this calls for us to set aside time to fast – that's disconnecting from the world (usually by giving up something physical – food, technology, etc) and setting aside that time to pray – to connect more with God.

And I just want to thank those of you that participated. I said this a couple of weeks ago as we were prepping for this, we don't fast to get things FROM God...we fast to get more OF God. And if your experience was hard or difficult to do OR maybe even a bit anticlimactic – you know, you didn't get an angel coming down and tapping you on the forehead, that's okay.

The benefits of fasting often come well after the fast AND God promises in Matt. 6 that when our heavenly Father sees us fasting in secret, he will reward us. I don't necessarily know what that reward is (it could be the answer to prayer you are looking for, it could be just a greater awareness of his presence, it could be something else) – I don't know what the reward is/will be, but I do know that if you chose to participate with us, it will be worth it!

And speaking of being worth it, this lead perfectly into the text we are looking at today because we are going to read about Paul and Barnabas continuing on and concluding their first missionary journey and what we are going to see is that it was worth it FOR SURE!

So, let's set it up, review a little bit and we'll get going. The title of the message today is a VERY creative one. I'm calling it: **The Sending Church – Part Two**

Now, as a reminder and by way of review, let's just cover some ground from last week. For those that missed, you can always go online and catch up on old messages, I'm going to quickly give you the cliff notes version (is that even a thing anymore?!) to get us all on the same page.

If you recall from last week, the church in Antioch (**SHOW MAP**) was praying and worshipping and fasting. In fact, this is where we got the inspiration to do a church-wide fast from.

This church according to **Acts 13:2-3** – “**While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I**

have called them.”³ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.”

Now, we played off of this a little last week and I urged you as your pastor and called us to think about, pray, model and emulate this “Sending Church” in Antioch. And I gave you three characteristics or “commitments” of a “Sending Church”.

I’ll put all three of them on the screen so you can see them at the same time. They were:

- 1. A Sending Church is committed to seeking God** (talk through – worship, prayer and fasting – this is when they heard from God!)
- 2. A Sending Church is committed to sending their best** (talk through – Paul and Barnabas – releasing Conroe to be its own autonomous church and I’m grateful to report that you supported and affirmed this decision so this coming Easter, Champion Forest Conroe will officially be Pillar Church in Conroe with Pastor Alec Brunson and it will be our first official *CF Connect* church.)
- 3. A Sending Church is committed to growing the Kingdom over their kingdom.**

We want to be the most effective we can be...and that’s not just having multi-sites, it’s also church planting and helping to the best of our ability not just grow our little kingdom, but to grow the Kingdom of God. And to do this we have to be willing to SEND, and we do this:

- By raising up members who feel called to go to the mission field and there are a number of our members that are serving in this way in different places around the world.
- We raise staff up (this included the new Residency Program and even other staff members. We never want to get upset if we see staff going somewhere else because of a calling on their life– it’s not that we want to lose them, but if they are going somewhere to help build the kingdom, we SEND them in Jesus name.
- This is where our giving comes in. We give nearly 2 million dollars a year to mission partners and churches that are going somewhere in North America or around the world with the gospel – and it’s our resources that are helping SEND them!

I just love what **J.D. Greear** says. I showed you this last week, but it’s worth repeating today: **“Sending capacity, not seating capacity is the mark of success for a Great Commission Church.”**

We want to be like Antioch and be a Sending Church that launches missionaries and helps plant churches around the world. This is what this first missionary journey is all about.

And so, they start here in Antioch in Syria (**SHOW MAP**), and we traced the first part of this journey:

- 300 miles from Jerusalem to Antioch
- 16 miles from Antioch to Seleucia
- 130 miles from Seleucia to Salamis
- 90 miles from Salamis to Paphos
- 200 miles from Paphos to Perga
- 100 miles from Perga to Antioch Pisidia

And now they are on the road again (that would have been a good title for the sermon!) and this time they are headed 80 miles to a place called Iconium.

Now, this is important because as I mentioned last week, all of this is what you know in the Bible as Asia Minor...it's modern day Turkey, but here's where it's going to mean even more to you Bible lovers - these little cities if you want to call them that...Iconium was a city, these other places that we'll read about today are more towns or villages...they are located in the region we know of as "Galatia".

So, listen carefully to what you hear today BECAUSE it will help you make sense of some of the things you read in the letter to the Galatians...that letter was meant for these churches that Paul and Barnabas visit here and much of what he writes is in a response of what we see taking place right here in Acts 14!

I LOVE this!!! Let's get after it. Like last week, we'll read through the passage...there's a lot here. I'll make some comments as we go and highlight some things that I think need to be brought out and then we'll conclude our time together with some application that will speak to us on both a personal and church level.

Acts 14:1 – “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.”

Remember, this was their strategy! Go to the Jewish synagogues first. It made sense – these were the people that would have been monotheistic...they worshipped Yahweh...would have been familiar with the Patriarchs the Law, the Prophets.

If there was ever a “lay-up” for someone accepting that Jesus was the Messiah, it should be the Jews. But as we learned last week, you don't know who is going to receive or reject the gospel. Our responsibility is to share it. Here, we see yet again another example of what is written in John 1:11, “Jesus came to his own and his own received him not!”.

Acts 14:2 – “But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.”

Illus. OBU - I don't want to stay here long, but anytime I read the word “mind” in the scripture, I always think back to one of my favorite professors at Ouachita. He taught me Baptist History (which I had to take twice), taught me a Christ and Culture class. It was in one of my first classes I ever had with him that he said, “Gentlemen, the battlefield for your life is in your mind. If Satan can win the war in your mind, he has you beat.”

I always think about that when I come across passages in scripture that have to deal with the mind...we are told in:

- 1 Peter 1:13 – “prepare your minds for action...”
- Rom. 12:2 – “don’t conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”
- 2 Cor. 10:5 – “take every thought captive and make it obedient to Jesus Christ.”

I think of this one when I read this passage in Acts 14. **2 Cor. 4:4 – “In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”**

All this to say, the role of the mind is so important when it comes to receiving and rejecting Christ. As Christians, we don’t check our minds at the door when we come to faith in Jesus. We have a faith that holds up under scrutiny and I want to challenge us all to be Christians that use our mind to not only embrace faith in Jesus, but to help combat the lies the Enemy would throw our way.

People today want to “poison our minds” just as people were trying to poison the minds of these Gentiles. And so, this is a call to Eph. 6 – put on the armor of God, starting with the helmet of salvation as we walk this Christian journey.

Let’s use our minds to grow in Christ...defend our faith...stand strong against the schemes of the evil one. And let’s not let anyone “poison our minds” or the minds of our children as we raise them to know, love and honor God.

Acts 13:3 – “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. (What a grace of God! They were preaching and God was coming alongside them and giving signs and wonders that validated their ministry and pointed to the fact that they were indeed from God.) ⁴But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. ⁵When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, ⁶they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, ⁷and there they continued to preach the gospel.”

Now, a couple of things here. First, this will nearly always be the response when we share the gospel. Some will receive it, and some will reject it.

Sharing Jesus...following Jesus...preaching Jesus will always divide! Jesus said as much!

Matt. 10:34-36 – “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ³⁶And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.”

What's Jesus teaching here? By simply following him as Lord of your life, it may in some cases cause division – even within your own house! But to truly follow Jesus we have to accept that and be willing to live with the tension and the consequences.

Jesus naturally divides! Bring him up at your next company social and see how it goes! Next Board meeting, school board session or group dynamic you find yourself in, just speak from a Biblical worldview and watch what happens! Jesus...his message naturally divides. Always has. Always will.

What we need is discernment in what we do when that message is dividing. Do we press in...do we back off? Do we keep going or do we “shake the proverbial dust from our feet and move on?”

We need God's Spirit to help us discern what to do in situations where we are sharing and preaching the gospel. Sometimes, we should stay and preach boldly just like Paul and Barnabas did for a long time (v. 3)...but then sometimes, we need to move on, just like Paul and Barnabas did.

When do we stay...when do we move on? When do we share with someone the love of Jesus, but when do we back off because they might not be ready or willing to listen. We must be sensitive to the Holy Spirit and let him guide us.

Now, Paul and Barnabas decide to leave and look where they go (**Show Map**) to Lystra which was 20 miles away and then to Derbe which was another 60 miles away! Now, what happens in Lystra is just AMAZING!

And before reading you what happens, let me share with you some of what was believed in that day that is really going to make what we read here in a moment come to life.

I was with a buddy of mine this week and we were talking about this passage and he brought this to light for me. About 40 years before this next event we read about in scripture happens, there was a Roman Poet that went by the name Ovid. He actually had a bigger name that I can't really pronounce so, I'm calling him along with others, Ovid. He wrote what is considered his greatest work called, *Metamorphosis* and it's just a linking together of all the great mythical stories of the past.

Well, one of those well-known stories share about a time when supposedly the gods, Jupiter (i.e. Zeus – Roman name) and Hermes came down from the heavens disguised as humans. And as the story goes, they walked around in and around this area of Lystra and went house to house looking for a place to rest, but no one opened their home to him...everyone locked them out.

No one would entertain them or show them hospitality EXCEPT for an elderly couple. And this elderly couple took care of them, fed them, NOT knowing it was actually Zeus and Hermes they were helping out.

After eating with them, the gods revealed who they actually were, and they were going to of course destroy the homes of all those in the town that rejected them - but to this elderly couple, they granted a favor to become caretakers of the temple dedicated to them and to die at the same time so they would not have to grieve one another's death.

That happened and the story IS that couple eventually do pass away at the same time and they became trees that were entwined together right near the temple and according to Ovid – again 40 years before this journey of Paul and Barnabas those trees were still there!

Now, I know you think I'm crazy with this story, but as God would have it, this week, I had the incredible privilege of spending some time with Dr. Steven Walton who just so happens to be writing the Word Biblical Commentary on the Book of Acts!

Illus. Dr. Steven Walton– (SHOW PIC) – He's a New Testament scholar and Research Supervisor at Trinity College in Bristol. I asked him about this account that Ovid wrote and whether or not he believed it was in the minds of those in Lystra and the surrounding areas, and he about jumped out of his seat explaining why he believed it and how it's helps explains the people's reaction that day!

So, with that story in mind, and remember, these are pagan people...idol worshippers. Let's pick up in:

Acts 14:8-15 – “Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. ⁹ He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, ¹⁰ said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And he sprang up and began walking. ¹¹ And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” (This has happened before and we missed it! We're not missing it this time...not getting destroyed this time!) ¹² Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. ¹³ And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. ¹⁴ But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments (expressed strong emotion, sorrow and grief) and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, ¹⁵ “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.”

Now, just a point to highlight here...Paul and Barnabas are not in a synagogue...they are in Paganville!

And so, he doesn't start with the patriarchs, and law and prophets – Paul is using some missiological wisdom here and starting at a place where everyone could identify. He starts with God and defines him as Creator!

When we share Jesus, let's start where people are and help them get where they need to be! When sharing Jesus, don't start sharing your views on systematic theology and eschatological

persuasions with people who don't know that Jesus is God's son! Just like we need wisdom and discernment on when to push and when to back away, we need wisdom and discernment on where to start gospel conversations.

AND while I'm in this area, I have had more than a few conversations this week with believers from different walks of life and I've asked all of them the same question – "When did you come to faith in Jesus? How did you come to faith in Jesus?"

Nearly 100%, a person came to Christ because of a friendship or a relationship they had with another Christian. My point is sometimes we get worked up about sharing our faith, and if we would just befriend those that don't know Jesus and be a genuine friend, chances are that person will eventually come to know Jesus...this is just the way it works!

Paul was on a missionary enterprise though. He was preaching! And he preaches about who God is...gives it to them on a level they can understand!

Illus. Dad – best preaching advice I've ever been given. "Put it on a shelf where everyone can get it!"

Paul puts it on a shelf where everyone can get it. And he continues in **Acts 14:16-18** – "**In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. 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.**"

Paul says, it's God, the Creator of everything...he's the one that's been providing for you, meeting your needs. But the people can't get over this miracle they have witnessed...they aren't hearing what Paul is saying because they are convinced these two guys are gods!

G.K. Chesterton: "When people stop believing in God, they do not believe in nothing. They believe in anything."

And that's true...people will believe in anything! This is why we tell them about the one, true God. So they will believe in the right thing! These people...they weren't having it!

Acts 14:18-19 – "**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.**"

Paul refused to be venerated. We don't know how much time passed between (v. 18) and (v. 19), but these crowds come down from Antioch and Iconium and they turn Lystra against Paul and stone him!

Just like Jesus, right? One day they worship him, the next day they crucify him. He was stoned! Left for dead!

We said it last week...it bears repeating! There is always a cost to following Jesus! ALWAYS a cost! Paul would reflect back a number of times at this event in his life.

2 Cor. 11:25 – “Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned...”

2 Tim. 3:10-12 – “ You, however, (Where was Timothy from? Lystra!) have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, ¹¹ my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. ¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...”

Gal. 6:17 – (Iconium, Lystra, Derbe – Galatia – he writes to the churches in Galatia) “From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.”

Perhaps he was talking about and reflecting back on this stoning that happened here. Who knows! What we do know is this certainly helped shape Paul’s thinking regarding suffering. He’s even going to write in this next section of scripture that it’s through many “tribulations” that we enter the kingdom of God.

Let’s look at it...we won’t stay here too long: **Acts 14:20-23 – “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. (SHOW MAP – Derbe is another 55-60 miles away)²¹ When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²² 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. 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.”**

Now, look, this blesses me...a lot of commentaries point this out and I find it to be a beautiful thing. Paul and Barnabas could have gone back to Antioch (**SHOW MAP**) and went through Tarsus!

Don’t you know Paul would have LOVED to have him some home-cooking...sleep in his bed so to speak...fist bump some of his buddies and enjoy some time in a place he knew well. Could have gone right back home and got him some comfort food and good rest!

Instead, he retraces his steps for the express purpose of going back and checking on the disciples that he has made, and the churches he has planted! I think that’s just beautiful!

And look at what they do when they come to these churches? Exactly what the church in Antioch did for them (v. 19) – they pray and fast, and commit them to the Lord. Ultimately, the church is the Lord’s to take care of.

Acts 14:24-28 – “Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. (SHOW MAP) ²⁵ And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, ²⁶ and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for

the work that they had fulfilled. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ And they remained no little time with the disciples.”

Amazing! I LOVE reading about this first missionary journey and all God did in and through Paul and Barnabas. Let me close this message out by bringing it home a bit and just give some practical application to it.

1. Missionary and church planting enterprises are worth it.

You know why? Because our God is a missionary God – God had one son, and he was a missionary. Jesus had twelve disciples save one in Judas. All of them were missionaries in their own way!

Jesus said in **John 20:21b** – “...As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”

Missionary and church planting enterprises are worth it because God is a missionary God, we are a missionary people and check this out: Missionary and church planting enterprises are worth it because people are worth it!

God loves people. His desire is for people to be in a relationship with him, and so he sends his people out (me and you) on mission so we can share his love with them.

Romans 10:13-15 – “For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”
¹⁴ **How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”**

Listen, if you are a believer in Jesus, you are a missionary! And your missionary journey might not look like Paul’s, but you have one as you go to school, go to work, go to the gym, go to the restaurant you frequent.

Everywhere we go, we are to be missionaries for Jesus! And it’s worth it! God is worthy of it and people are worth it! Just look at how the church in Antioch celebrated Paul and Barnabas and the work God accomplished through them!

I’m telling you, Champion Forest, we’ve always been a mission-minded church. And by God’s grace we’re going to SEND more and more missionaries and missionary teams out and we are through the CF Connect going to plant more and more churches.

Let’s commit today to stay on mission and support more and more missionary and church planting enterprises!

2. All churches need localized leadership as well as strengthening and encouragement.

Remember, what Paul did! He didn't return to Antioch through Tarsus to go home. Instead, he and Barnabas retraced their steps and established elders in the churches...pastors that could lead them and teach them.

They strengthened them! They encouraged them! I hope that's what you get here when you come every Sunday. Whether it's in your life group or here in the service...I pray that you leave here strengthened and encouraged in the faith!

That's our job as elders and localized leadership. We exist according to **Eph. 4:11-16** – “**And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up (edification and encouragement) the body of Christ,¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”**

All churches need localized leadership as well as strengthening and encouragement. One of the reasons we started the CF Connect is for this very purpose...to strengthen and encourage churches all over North America and we're committed to it. We want to resource them, bring them here on our campus, expose them to the Lanier Library and our partnership there.

Pastors and churches MORE than ever need to be strengthened and encouraged. And let me just say here to all those that teach and lead Life Groups, to those that serve and lead in children's and student ministries, THANK YOU so much for what you do...you are making a difference and you are strengthening our church.

3. It's a privilege to join God in his work and give him all the glory.

Man, I think about this passage and it just amazes me the way God used Paul and Barnabas. He didn't have to! But he chose to...and because this Sending Church in Antioch was praying and worshipping and fasting, God spoke to them and they were SENT on mission.

And he uses them to bring people to Jesus, to make disciples and plant churches...simply amazing that WE get to be a part of what God is doing! We are the lucky ones here! What a privilege to be able to serve him. And then give him the glory for what he has done – notice (v. 27) they declared all that God had done!

This was a work of God and it's a privilege to join him in his work and give him the glory.

So the final challenge is to join God in what he is doing...find a ministry to serve...a mission to be a part of...let everything you do be about bringing him glory and giving him glory. It's ALL about him.

One commentator I read, said this: “The grace had come from him; the glory must go to him.”

And to that I say, “Amen and Amen”.

Will you pray with me?

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.