

Acts 14:1-28 Taking a Hit for the Kingdom

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We are back in Acts this morning after a short break and we are going to be getting through relatively large chunks of scripture so as to keep the flow of the narrative or story line.

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My title for the message this morning is “Taking a Hit for the Kingdom”.

But before we get into it I want to say that I’m feeling a little bored at the moment in my faith and what I mean by that is that in the west we can often have our lives so tightly organized and arranged, so comfortable and predictable and so inoculated from the gospel truth causing a ruckus in the world and some healthy persecution of which I see played out time and again in Acts.

Now please don’t get me wrong as I’m not saying that I don’t enjoy all those things but having come back from Indonesia where there were no doubt elements of what I have just mentioned, there appeared to also be a lot more unpredictability in coming into contact with people of a different culture and bringing the word of God without the bondage of the religious traditions of man.

Rudy virtually every session we were with the pastors wanted to model being led by the spirit during the meetings and not following rigidly some preprogrammed traditional formula and I have to say that it was exciting, particularly when he opened the floor to questions.

I personally often wish that I could preach what I preach on Sundays to multitudes out on the streets. And this is not to say that I’m dissatisfied doing what I’m doing at the moment as this is what God has opened up for me, but I’m hungry for more.

I want people to know that I follow and am passionate about God even if this ruffles their feathers.

I took our La Pavoni espresso machine to the espresso machine doctor this Thursday just gone and it was just around the corner from the Richmond Ikea in Abbotsford. As one of the technicians and I got the unit out the back of my car, we went into the shop and this particular guy with such passion was describing one of the other machines that were in the shop ready for repair. I asked him how the name of their company 9bar Espresso came about and once again with passion and energy he described that 9bar is the amount of pressure it takes to pull a good espresso with the right amount of crema. Anything less or more produces a suboptimal coffee.

His passion honestly left me feeling that I wanted to leave my job then and there and go and work with him in his company.

He is passionate about coffee and we can often be so dispassionate about the creator of the universe.

This was not the case in the book of Acts.

Acts 14:1-28

Paul and Barnabas at Iconium

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.

2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.

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.

I am desperate for God to grant signs and wonders by our hands. I want to speak the word boldly, not timidly or not at all.

Will you pray for our church that we will be a church that is lovingly bold in our witness and that God would bear witness to the word of his grace with signs and wonders?

4 But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles.

5 When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them,

6 they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country,

7 and there they continued to preach the gospel.

Honestly in the affluent west might have cautioned Paul and Barnabas to tone it down a bit or to just let it go. It's getting too dangerous guys. But no they continued to preach the gospel.

Let us never get sidetracked from preaching the gospel. We never want to preach the latest and greatest Christian fad or wisdom from the world - we must preach the gospel.

Paul said to the Romans that he was indebted to preach the gospel. He and we owe the world the good news. Let's first of all truly understand and appropriate

the good news to our own lives but then not be afraid to give witness to it to those who don't know without cringing or fear of retribution.

Paul and Barnabas at Lystra

8 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.

I love the way that Jesus and Paul healed people. They always looked for faith and then they didn't pray a long prayer but simply told the person to do something related to their illness that would allow them to exercise their faith and as they did see the results.

This can become a formula if we are not careful and without faith expect to get the same results. There must be faith.

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!"

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 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.

16 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."

18 Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

This phenomenon of people lifting up and exalting individuals whom God uses to heal others still carries on today. We might dress it up a bit and make it look a bit sanctified but it still the same hero worship that Paul and Barnabas strongly fought against.

Paul Stoned at Lystra

19 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.

20 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.

This is just crazy stuff. I know it was a time when stoning people to death for crimes was the punishment of the day but Paul's bravery in being prepared to take a hit for the kingdom is astonishing.

The miracle of him virtually being raised from the dead even more astonishing.

This guy was so convinced of the gospel and the temporal nature of this earthly existence to such an extent that he was fearless and almost indestructible.

Someone should make a world class movie about his life.

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.

Here we see the New Testament pattern for establishing the kingdom of God on earth at its high point.

1) The gospel is preached

2) Disciples are made through teaching and applying the gospel to their lives

3) Disciples come together to form a local church and are not left to their own devices but strengthened and encouraged to continue in the faith along with the warning that there will be troubling times for those who are entering the kingdom of God.

4) Leadership is put in place by apostolic ministry in each local church to continue to care for warn and protect these disciples so that this pattern can be repeated many times in many parts of the world.

This is what we are here for!

Paul and Barnabas Return to Antioch in Syria

24 Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia.

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.

We finish this first apostolic trip that took around 2years to complete with the apostles returning to where they were sent out from, retelling to the church all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

I am a fairly conservative type of guy and growing up was very shy, but for the sake of the Jesus and his gospel I want to be prepared to put myself out, to be prepared to be ridiculed, to look foolish, to be snubbed if only Jesus is glorified in my life, our church and the kingdom of God.

Can I ask you to stand with me know if you want the same for your lives?

Let's pray.