

ACTS
Patterns in Evangelism
Acts 14:1-20

Acts 14 is a chapter which tells us about the patterns which were set up in first century evangelism. These patterns not only include certain methods but also include certain psychological and spiritual patterns which occur when the Gospel is preached. There was always a positive and negative response to the preached Word. Usually there was some kind of persecution from the Jews or Gentiles who were rejecters of Christ. Lastly, there was also the devices of Satan to keep the Gospel from spreading. Satan has a pattern to his opposition and he always strikes when the message of Christ is preached with power and when a person least expects it.

Acts 14 is a pattern for all Christian witness in any age. If this pattern is followed today, it will always result in the same reactions that you find recorded in the book of Acts. If we at Grace Church follow the biblical pattern, we will experience essentially the same things the first century Christians experienced.

OPPOSITION AT ICONIUM (Acts 14:1-6)

Plan (14:1a)

“And it came about that in Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, . . .” -- Paul and Barnabas had been expelled from Antioch of Pisidia because the Jews stirred up prominent women of the city who in turn influenced the male leaders to take action against the missionaries. They shook the dust off their feet in protest and came to Iconium. Iconium, Lystra and Derbe were cities in the province of Galatia. The whole area of Galatia was notorious for its impenetrable paganism. The people who settled in Galatia were Gauls, a Celtic tribe from the same stock which inhabited France. They were a warlike people and in 189 B.C. they were made subjects of the Roman Empire. They were fiercely nationalistic and held on to their customs and language. Caesar said of the Gauls, “The infirmity of the Gauls is that they are fickle in their resolves, fond of change, and not to be trusted.” Iconium was a pagan, Gentile city about 85 miles from Antioch of Pisidia. Iconium prided itself on its age; therefore, it was a city filled with fascinating history. It was the Williamsburg of Galatia.

In church history, Iconium was famous for the false book, “The Acts of Paul and Theckla.” According to this false book, the Apostle Paul fell in love with a young woman called Theckla and their romance became so torrid that it broke up her whole family, and therefore turned the whole city against the missionaries and Theckla. This, of course, did not happen. One interesting account in her book was a physical description of the Apostle Paul. She described him as, “one of moderate height, scanty hair (bald), bowlegged, strongly built, small in stature, large eyes with meeting eyebrows, a rather long nose, full of grace, sometimes looking like a man, sometimes having the face of an angel.” This, of course, is tradition and not necessarily authentic; however, there may be some truth in Paul's description.

The plan of evangelism for these early Christians was to go to the Jewish synagogue first because these people were already acquainted with the Old Testament Scriptures and many Gentile proselytes were receptive to the Gospel. The principle for us today should be to reach Jews first, if possible, and explain the Gospel to people in liberal churches who still have some respect for the written Word of God but who may not be Christian at all.

Notice how the missionaries started with the most natural contact. The principle is that we should witness to those with whom we have natural contacts first -- family, friends, church associations and so forth.

Preaching (14:1b)

“. . . and, spoke in such a manner that a great multitude believed, both Jews and Greeks.” -- When the Gospel was preached, there was an immediate response. The Gospel was so radical that it made an impact upon these pious Jews

and pagan Gentiles. The Gospel shook people; it jolted people; it awakened people and made them sit up and take notice. What is meant when it says Paul “spoke in such a manner” (“so spake” - KJV)? Was Paul so convincing, so logical, so eloquent and so confident that he persuaded men to become Christians? Surely, Paul was a good orator, but this is not the meaning of “spoke in such a manner,” Paul's secret was that he preached under the Holy Spirit's power. When he preached, his message was anointed and empowered by the Spirit and this it people like a ton of bricks and they believed.

“And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you expect Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God” (I Cor. 2:1-5).

It is impossible with good rhetoric alone to win men to Christ. There must also be the power and demonstration of the Spirit who breaks through man's blindness, rebellion and corruption so that a person is enabled to believe in Christ.

Persecution (14:2)

“But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles, and embittered them against the brethren.” -- The vast majority of the Jews rejected the Gospel of Christ and stirred up trouble against the Christians. This was a deceitful, poisonous, whispering campaign against the missionaries. A clear pattern in gospel preaching is seen in that it stirs opposition. Somehow the Jews, through lies and half truths, poisoned the minds of many in the community against the Christians, especially the missionaries.

This subtle opposition was instigated ultimately by Satan, who will never allow the true preaching of the Gospel to go unchallenged. Persecution is part of preaching the Gospel, and Satan brings this persecution to discourage Christians in their witness. As one studies church history, he finds that the Gospel has always been met with great opposition.

Perseverance (14:3)

“Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders done by their hands.” -- Because of the opposition, the missionaries dug in their heels, determined not to draw back, decided to make an impact on the community for Christ. Most of us might read this, “They spent a short time,” but it says “long time” and this may have been weeks or months. Opposition did not stifle their zeal but made them more determined to bear fruit for Christ. They spoke boldly, and as they spoke, they relied on the Lord by faith. Instead of being intimidated, they became more courageous in the face of opposition.

The missionaries were preaching “the word of His grace.” They were declaring the grace of God; that is, there is cleansing, forgiveness, freedom from guilt, and power for living for all those who believe in Christ. Grace is given by God to those who deserve nothing from Him.

Plot (14:4-6)

“But the multitude of the city was divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles.” -- The Gospel of Christ always divides people into believers and unbelievers, acceptors and rejecters. The Gospel is not intended to bring peace, except to the individual heart. It is God's plan that the truth of Christ would be divisive.

“Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two, and two against three. They will be divided, father against son, and son against father; mother against daughter, and daughter against mother; mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law” (Luke 12:51-53).

No neutrality is possible when the Gospel is preached in the power of the Holy Spirit.

One of the patterns in evangelism is that the Gospel always divides those who are affected by it. If an individual Christian or a local church is truly preaching Christ, there will be a division between friends and community. If there is social acceptance of a local church by the world, that Christian church is not doing its job.

This is the first time in the book of Acts that both Barnabas and Paul are called apostles, which indicates there were more than the original twelve who were apostles, although the original twelve had a special position.

“And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them, they became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region; . . .” -- Somehow the missionaries found out about this plot, and they fled. Sometimes it is right to flee persecution. If Christians can flee, they should, unless God tells them to stay. God never wants His people to foolishly throw their lives away when engaged in His service.

EXALTATION AT LYSTRA (Acts 14:7-20)

Preaching the Gospel (14:7)

“. . . and there they continued to preach the gospel.” -- In Lystra and Derbe, the apostles preached the Gospel. Persecution did not dampen the zeal of the missionaries. They continued to tell people about Christ who died for sinners, who was raised from the dead to give men a righteous standing before God, who forgives sins and who will judge men unless they repent and turn to Jesus Christ by faith. Another pattern of evangelism is that God's true ministers never stop preaching the Gospel and they consider it a privilege to suffer for Christ.

Notice that Paul and Barnabas **PREACHED THE GOSPEL**. They did not discuss social affairs, politics, current events or housing problems. They preached Christ who changes lives when men trust in Him.

Power to Heal (14:8-10)

“And at Lystra there was sitting a certain man, without strength in his feet, lame from his mother’s womb, who had never walked. This man was listening to Paul as he spoke. who, when he had fixed his gaze upon him, and had seen that he had faith to be made well, said with a loud voice, ‘Stand upright on your feet.’ And he leaped up and began to walk,” -- Lystra was a small, rural community and apparently there was no Jewish synagogue there. At Lystra there was a lame man. After this man had heard Paul preach the Gospel, he was greatly touched, Paul probably perceived in this man a change of countenance. Perhaps Paul realized that the man had made a genuine response to Christ for salvation. Paul also perceived that this man had the faith to be healed so he said, “Stand upright on your feet,” and he was miraculously healed.

These apostles had the sign gifts as their credentials and they did miracles to prove that their message was from God. As far as I know, there is no one today with any sign gifts. This kind of healing does not take place today; therefore, there are no sign gifts. If men have the sign gifts today, why don't they use them in the hospitals? God heals today in a sovereign way through faith and prayer but it is questionable whether the sign gift of miracles is still in existence.

Here, too, is another pattern. When the Gospel is preached, sometimes it is accompanied by other supernatural phenomena which is from God. This does not always involve physical miracles of healing. In fact, physical miracles are rare, but things happen that we can not always explain in human terms. Men and women experience the freedom that is in Christ Jesus. They are able to rid themselves of habits, thoughts and attitudes that were harmful and injurious to them before conversion and which enslaved their personalities. With this release, there is sometimes supernatural phenomena surrounding it.

Peril of Man Worship (14:11-13)

“And when the multitudes saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, ‘The gods have become like men and have come down to us.’ And they began calling Barnabas Zeus (Jupiter), and Paul, Hermes (Mercurius), because he was the chief speaker.” -- There was no question in the minds of the Lystrians that

a miracle had been done. They became so excited that they began speaking in the Lycaonian language, a Greek-Syrian dialect which the apostles could not understand. Apparently, when they became deeply involved in their pagan religion, they reverted back to their native language. There is a reason why they thought Paul and Barnabas to be Hermes and Zeus. There was a tradition in Lystra that Zeus and Hermes had already come to Lystra in the ancient past. These gods sought to get hospitality from the city but only two Lycaonians, Philemon and Baucis, had been kind to them and entertained them unawares. The gods became angry with Lystra and destroyed it but gave special blessing to Philemon and Baucis. These Lystrians, when they saw the miracle of Paul and Barnabas, thought that Zeus and Hermes had returned. Zeus was the national God of the Greeks. Zeus was the most powerful of all the gods for he was said to give power to all the gods and to hold sway over them. Everything but the Fates were subservient to his will. Therefore, because Barnabas probably had a long beard he was thought to be Zeus. Some commentators have also thought that because Zeus was portrayed as a robust, athletic person that Barnabas also fit this same kind of description. Hermes (Mercury) was the chief messenger of the gods and was considered the god of eloquence. Because Paul was small and spoke a lot, he was called Mercury or Hermes. These ignorant, superstitious, rural people actually felt the gods had come down among them in the likeness of men.

“And the priest of Zeus whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.” -- These Lystrians wanted to put Paul and Barnabas on a pedestal and worship them as gods. Imagine the temptation of going into a city and being welcomed as a god. What a subtle attack of the devil. What an appeal to the ego of the apostles. What an exalting of the flesh. The priest of the temple of Zeus, which stood at the gate of every city, took two oxen to offer as sacrifice to these man-gods. The missionaries had great popularity and could have taken over the whole city on their own terms, playing on the ignorance of this rural folk.

Satan could not destroy the Gospel through persecution so he tried to destroy the apostles through an ego trip. The most subtle Satanic attack on any Christian worker is when men want to worship the worker rather than the Lord, to put the worker on the pedestal rather than Christ. This really feeds the ego, but Christian workers must never accept this kind of adulation and must resist it with all their might.

Protest by the Apostles (14:14-18)

“But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out. . .” -- The reason the missionaries did not catch on to what was happening was that they did not understand the Lycaonian dialect. As soon as they understood, they were horrified. They expressed their anger, grief and disgust by tearing their robes.

“. . . and saying, ‘Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you in order 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.’” -- The apostles immediately dispelled any claims to deity and stated they were no more than ordinary men. The missionaries made it clear that they were there to preach the Gospel of Christ so that they would turn from their idolatry to the One, True and Living God. Paul and Barnabas were telling these Lystrians, “What you worship is vanity. You worship false gods. Your worship is empty because it is towards something which does not exist. It is a fairy tale. There is no such thing as Zeus and Hermes.” These Lystrians were to repent, giving up their wrong thinking and practices, and accept Christ who would put them in touch with the Living God. These pagans had a god for everything -- a god of water, fire, trees, sex, rocks and a multitude of others. They were polytheists. Only Christ can turn men from these idols which are deaf, dumb, blind and powerless.

Notice how Paul approached these pagan Gentiles. He did not start with the Bible as he always did with the Jews who believed in special revelation, but he began with general revelation. He started with nature and declared that God created the heavens, earth and all living things. He began where these pagan people were in their understanding. God has revealed Himself, to those who do not have written revelation, in nature. Men have light about God, but what light they do have they suppress and reject because they are sinners by nature.

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the

truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened” (Rom. 1:18-21)

Another pattern of evangelism is to start with a person where he is. When speaking to non-church people, begin with nature and their relationship to God, then move on to Christ and special revelation. Show them that nature has order, unity and beauty because of a Creator. Everything exists and functions because it is made and controlled by God, who is a living God and this God has revealed Himself in Christ which is special revelation.

“And in the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; . . .” -- Before the gospel message came, God in His sovereignty, permitted all Gentile nations to walk in their own ways and conduct themselves without the restraints and restrictions of written law. They were allowed to follow their own reason, thinking, passion, desires, and systems of religion, but now God is taking the Gospel to all Gentile nations.

This verse may imply that God has permitted free choice in this universe which explains the presence of sin. In order for men to make responsible choices, there must be the possibility of evil. This answers the problem for the pagan mind, “If God is so loving, why does He allow war, evil and injustices?” Man, left to his free choice, chooses for evil, but he must have responsible choice in order not to be a robot. Yet, man left to his own free will, failed miserably. By allowing man to walk in his own way, God proved that man's way is the way of sin and that divine intervention is necessary if men are to be brought to God and follow Him in righteousness.

“. . . and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” -- In many ways, the Living God declared His existence and moral character. God is in control of this world and His moral goodness can be seen everywhere. The kindness and goodness of God should lead men to repentance, for all men are dependent upon Him for their very existence.

“And even saying these things, they with difficulty restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them.” -- The apostles had a hard time convincing the people that they were not gods, but they would not compromise the truth or fan their egos.

They did not try to mix Christianity and paganism to get results as some have done in the history of the church. They did not use their popularity to get inroads for the Gospel, for the people, at this point, would have believed anything Paul and Barnabas told them. They stood for the truth, exposed errors, and would not compromise in any way in order to reach people.

Persecution by the Enemy (14:19)

“But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.” -- Some of these Jews, who dogged Paul 's trail wherever he went, came from as far away as Antioch of Pisidia (100 miles) to harass Paul, stir the crowds against Christianity and stop the Gospel from being presented. Unfortunately, haters of Christianity often display more zeal in destroying the Faith than lovers of Christianity do in protecting the Faith. Bad men will often travel further to do evil than good men will to do good; and wicked men often show more zeal in opposing the Gospel than professed Christians do in advancing it. But this was not the case with Paul. These Jews stirred the crowd against Paul and Barnabas. What fickle people these Lystrians were. What a switch. What a change. One minute they worshipped Paul as a god and the next minute they were stoning him. They stoned Paul and seeing no sign of life in him they dragged him outside the city, probably to the city dump, and left him for the jackals and buzzards to eat.

There is debate among Christian scholars as to whether Paul actually died and was resurrected or was merely thought dead and then revived. If Paul was actually dead, then it is thought that this is when he experienced a heavenly vision.

“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago -- whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know,

God knows -- such a man was caught up to the third heaven. And I know how such a man -- whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows -- was caught up into Paradise, and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak” (II Cor. 12:2-4).

However, this verse says they “supposed him to be dead.” Apparently he was not dead, but they thought he was, and this is the time in the book of Galatians he mentions his stoning. “From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus” (Gal. 6:1.7). Paul had probably received a blow to the head that rendered him apparently lifeless. It was a temporary concussion that can be recovered from quickly.

The devil always tries to stop the message of Christ, even if it means destroying the messengers of Christ. When everything else fails, he falls back on his most obvious device -- violence. Satan's opposition to the Gospel is real and it takes all kinds of weird forms, even physical death.

Preservation by God (14:20)

“But while the disciples stood around him, he arose and entered the city” -- It is hard to imagine the reaction in the heart and mind of these saints of God as they gathered around the crumpled, bruised and bleeding body of Paul. Surely there was weeping and much prayer. Their champion and beloved friend had been killed (they thought) in the service of Christ. Perhaps the disciples were thinking of a proper burial when Paul raised his head and said, “Hold the funeral! I’m not dead yet!” It must have been a very alarming and exciting moment for everyone. Surely we see here the preservation of God, and a miracle. Whether Paul was raised from the dead or merely revived, it was a miracle in that there was such a rapid recovery from the effects of the stoning. Notice when Paul revived, he went back into the city of Lystra where he was stoned. This took real courage, but he sensed the protective hand of God. We are not told whether Paul preached or not in Lystra, but I think he probably did, even though he left the next day. His mere bodily presence, after they thought him dead, would have given him an audience with the people who stoned him. This, however, may have caused even more problems for Paul because the superstitious Lystrians probably thought that Paul was now a super-god since he had been raised from the dead.

“And the next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe.” -- The next day they went on their way to the last city of the first missionary journey, Derbe, before they returned to Antioch of Syria. We are told that the missionaries had a very successful ministry in Derbe for when “they had preached the gospel to the city and had made many disciples” they returned home (Acts 14:21). Apparently the opposition was not so great in Derbe as it was in Iconium and Lystra. Perhaps God gave them great success in Derbe to encourage them to continue on in the ministry.

CONCLUSION

Saved

For us who are saved, we must remember to preach the Gospel at all costs. We must be fiery heralds as were Paul and Barnabas. We must declare the message of Christ with authority and courage, and in the power of the Spirit. We must preach the Gospel in such a way that we seek to correct the wrong thinking of men, correct their wrong patterns of living and set them on the highway to heaven as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. When we proclaim Christ, we must expect to divide men, to drive them into opposite camps, to stir the anger of the unbelieving world. We cannot be popular with men and be true to Christ at the same time. Unless our gospel message is a dividing, separating influence, flinging men into opposite camps, it is not the Gospel that the apostles preached. When the Gospel divides, it often brings persecution and we must be willing to pay the price to follow Christ. Surely none of us has even come close to the dedication of Paul.

“Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as if insane) I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; . . .” -- (II Cor. 11:23-26).

Remember, that all of Satan's devices against Christians are geared to one end -- to get Christians to stop proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost world. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will give you the power to speak for Christ.

Unsaved

The Gospel of Christ divides men into two classes of people -- believers and unbelievers, and acceptors and rejecters. Has the Gospel of Christ, through this message, pierced your mind? Do you feel a need for a Savior who can deliver you from the guilt in your soul? Do you feel bound by sin and long to be set free from habits, thoughts and attitudes which are harmful and injurious to you? Believe in Christ as the One died for your sins. Bow to Christ as your Lord, giving Him the right to rule in your life. Yes, the Gospel divides, but you can, by an act of your will, receive Christ put yourself on the side of the Lord. You have heard the truth of Christ. You are without excuse!