

# STAY ENCOURAGED

## Acts 14.1-28

Paul and Barnabas practiced a speaking ministry (Acts 14.1, 3, 7, 15, 21, 25). The content of their message was the death and resurrection of God's Son, the Lord Jesus. They tried to persuade their listeners to believe in Jesus and follow Him (Acts 14.1-7). As they spoke the truth, they trusted God's Spirit to open people's eyes and soften their hearts.

Their ministry had mixed results. How did they stay encouraged? How do we stay encouraged in that same mission?

### **Let's see people as spiritually interested (vv. 11-18)**

The people of Lystra are devoted to the ancestral Greek gods. This draws our attention to what is generally termed the "phenomenology of religion". This is the widely attested truth that most people who have ever lived, and most people alive today, believe in a spiritual realm.

Paul and Barnabas:

Humble themselves and exalt God (Acts 14.15, Cf. Acts 12.22-23).

Demonstrate the inadequacy of man-made gods (Acts 14.15).

Speak about general revelation/common grace - all good things come from God (Acts 14.17; Matthew 5.45; James 1.17). Can we find a point of agreement?

"Because the world in an absolute sense is the work of God, and owes both its nature and its being, at the beginning and ever after, to its Maker, every creature manifests something of God's excellencies and perfections" (H. Bavinck, *Magnalia Dei*, 22).

We ought to see our world full of the possibility of winning souls. Each new day brings the opportunity to show the love and light of Christ.

### **Let's have realistic expectations about life in a fallen world (vv. 19-23)**

Paul faces violent opposition. He is stoned and left for dead (Acts 14.19; Cf. 2 Corinthians 11.25). This was grounds for discouragement, running away, and quitting. Remarkably, Paul and Barnabas' first instinct is to return to the people who tried to kill them (Acts 14.20).

They go "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" (Acts 14.22). We can characterize the Christian view as "hopeful realism".

We can set expectations that Christians face fiery trials (Cf. 2 Timothy 3.12). It is in the season of testing and trial that faith is authenticated. When less mature believers see mature believers suffer with joy, it strengthens their faith.

### **Let's be motivated by giving God the glory (vv. 26-27)**

Most of us are motivated by visible results. We are easily discouraged by rejection and opposition. Does ministry come down to attendance and budgets?

Paul and Barnabas are quick to point out how God deserves all the credit (Acts 14.27).

**Key Point:** Even in opposition, God's mission goes forward.

### **Small Group Application Questions:**

What is the danger of teaching "easy-believism" – that the Christian life demands little and guarantees pleasant experiences?

What does this passage teach us about hardship in the Christian life? What is a distinctively Christian view of life's trials?

How can we strengthen and encourage one another in the faith (Acts 14.22)?

Why do Paul and Barnabas "appoint elders in every church" (Acts 14.23)?