**Acts 14 (Persistence)**

**Introduction**

Paul and Barnabas have been set aside by the Holy Spirit for “the work he called them to” (Acts 13:2). They go out on what we generally call Paul’s First Missionary Journey. They have a lot of “adventures” during their travels which are contained in Acts 13-14. Our goal this morning is simply to hit the highlight from Acts 14.

**Outline**

14:1-7: Iconium

* Preach with boldness (14:3)
* City divided (14:4)
* Attempt to stone Paul and Barnabas (14:5)

14:8-20: Lystra

* Lame man healed (14:8-10)
* Want to worship Barnabas (Zeus) and Paul (Heremes)
* Sermon on creation and against idols (14:14-18)
* Paul stoned (14:19)

14:21-28: Conclusion of the Journey

* Revisit every church to (a) strengthen their souls and (b) encourage them
* Establish elders
* Return to Antioch church excited about God’s work

The focus of our lesson is simply to emphasize persistence.

**Persistence of Paul and Barnabas**

I want us to note the persistence of the missionaries (do not forget Barnabas). In Iconium they at first have success (14:1) followed quickly by trouble (14:2) which leads to division (14:4). How do Paul and Barnabas respond to this situation? They preach the word of God boldly (14:3). They have to leave town because some prominent people want to stone them so they go to Lystra and Derbe (14:6). This is not the first time Paul’s life has been threatened (9:23-25). The text makes clear this does not stop them, but informs us they continued to preach the gospel people wanted to kill them for (14:7). The threat of death cannot stop them from delivering the gospel message.

While 14:6 lists several places they travel to in 14:8 we read a story about when they are at Lystra. Paul hears a lame man who has never walked and the crowds want to sacrifice to him and Barnabas. They are able to stop the crowd from sacrificing to them… barely (14:18). Sadly, the crowd is fickle. Instead of sacrificing to Paul they are convinced to stone him (14:19).

Response:

* 14:20: Got up and entered city (crowd is against him in 14:19)
* 14:21: Returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch
	+ Lystra: stoned (14:19)
	+ Iconium: wanted to stone (14:5)
	+ Antioch: Jews from Antioch were involved in stoning (14:19)
* 14:22: Many tribulations
* 14:23: Prayers and fasting

They will not stop and they will not change course. They are persistent in their message of preaching the gospel.

**Persistence of Opponents**

Paul and Barnabas are not the only ones who are persistent in Acts 14. At every stop on the Journey there is some type of opposition that they face.

The disbelieving Jews stir up and embittered half the city at Iconium (14:2). They are able to make half the town so bitter many are wanting to stone Paul and Barnabas (14:5).

The opponents of Paul and Barnabas travel for ??? Miles to stone Paul! They are skilled at turning changing people’s minds because they are able to win over the crowd.

***Lessons***

**1. Evil will be persistent**

I think this is part of the point of Matthew 13:24-30 (Parable of Weeds), we will live among the wicked and we must learn how to live righteously. Many will be persistent in wickedness.

Psalm 140:2: “Who devise evil things in their hearts; They continually stir up wars.”

* David; Evil men causing problems and using their tongues to destroy

Proverbs 6:14: “Who with perversity in his heart continually devises evil, Who spreads strife.”

* Worthless person (6:12-15) and Things God hates (Prov 6:16-19)

Isaiah 65:3: “A people who continually provoke Me to My face, Offering sacrifices in gardens and burning incense on bricks…”

* God calls the people but they are persistent in sin

Evil is persistent because our enemy (devil) is persistent.

**2. Learn to be persistent in a wicked world**

Difficulty can cause us to consider giving up… I think this is what the devil wants

* Moses (Ex 5:22-23)
* Elijah (1 Kgs 19)

Think about the Christians gathering around Paul after he was stoned (14:20)! That is bravery to be willing to associate with someone who was just stoned. Think about those who remained faithful in these difficult places. Think of those who took on positions of leadership (14:23).

**3. How Could Paul and Barnabas be so persistent?**

Their focus was not on their own suffering or problems but were focused on the mission God had called them to do. Sometimes we get focused on our problems and it distracts us from the real mission. Notice this is a consistent attitude of Paul’s throughout Acts.

* 14:27: All God had done
* 16:25: Singing and praising God after being beaten
* 20:1: Encourages Christians after riot in Ephesus
* Acts 20-21 facing death but not worried
* 22:21; 26:19: In prison but explaining about the mission God has given him

Let’s keep our focus on the mission God has given us. Lets keep our focus on what God has done for us.