

Series: Acts

Lesson: 48

Title: The Word of His Grace

Scripture: Acts 14: 1-4

Date: 12-18-08

Place: Sovereign Grace Baptist Church of Princeton, New Jersey

Some of you under the sound of my voice are right now abiding under the wrath of God. If you were to die this hour you would stand before God without faith in Christ, without an Advocate to represent you. That ought to be reason enough for you to give your full attention to find out all you can about the sinner's only hope.

The Son of God willingly took the form of a servant to live and die to make atonement for offensive, sin-filled, God-hating, undeserving wretches, who neither loved him or had a desire to even know him. Hearing that he loved God and the brethren which God gave to him so much that he willingly suffered the shame of being made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him, ought to be reason enough for you to give something as easy and free as your time and your attention to find out all you can about him.

There are faithful men in this church who have gone to great lengths seeking the Lord's direction, in giving of themselves in every way--paying the rent on this place, for the support so you can have a pastor, and all the other expenses involved--so that you all you have to do is come to this place, sit down, relax, and listen to the word of the Lord. Just showing common respect to those who have spent of themselves to provide this for you ought to be motivation enough for you give your attention for just one hour.

There are 168 hours in a week. The average person is awake somewhere around 112 of those hours. If you work a 50 hour work week (for most of you who are in school—between school, homework and a part-time job—you probably spend less than 50 hours working) that leaves at least 62 hours. We meet to worship God only 3 hours each week. And how much of those remaining 59 hours do we spend in the word of God, in prayer, in seeking him in private. But when we consider how little time we actually spend seeking the Lord, it ought to give us a desire to give our attention during this time.

So I ask you tonight to give me your undivided attention. The point of my message deals with why the preaching of God's word is so vitally important. **Acts 14: 1: And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. 2: But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. 3: Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. 4: But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.**

Proposal: This short passage tells us what the Lord Jesus Christ is now doing from his throne in glory in this earth wherever he send his gospel.

Verse 3 says "**Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.**"

RSV: Acts 14: 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.

Literal Translation: Acts 14: 3: Long time, indeed, therefore, did they abide speaking boldly in the Lord, WHO is testifying to the word of His grace, and granting signs and wonders to come to pass through their hands.

I. The Work Christ Begins Through the Gospel.

Acts 14: 1: And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews and so spoke...Wherever, the King of glory is pleased to send forth his preachers they go forth with the Lord abiding in them and thereby they abide in the Lord. The miracle of grace of raising pastors is in itself one way in which Christ testifies to us of his grace and is one of the signs and wonders he performs. But with those he raises up, he is with them always. Remember what the Lord commanded his witnesses, and his promise, **Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen. (Matthew 28: 19, 20.)** It is true that Paul and Barnabas went "both together into the synagogue of the Jews," but truly the reason they "spoke so" is because Christ, with Paul and Barnabas "went both together into the synagogue."

Acts 14: 3: declares that as they spoke boldly in the Lord, but it was the Lord, **WHO is testifying to the word of His grace, and granting signs and wonders to come to pass through their hands.** As the Lord Jesus sends forth his word through his preachers it is the Lord Jesus Christ himself who testifies to the word of his grace--bearing witness to his grace in the hearts of his redeemed. He causes us to behold that he is the sign and wonder from the LORD of hosts, in Mt. Zion.

The signs and wonders which our Lord Jesus performed when he walked this earth--and those signs and wonders performed by the apostles--all declared what sinners need done in us in the spirit: like Lazarus, we are dead, buried in the grave clothes of sin and depravity, the stone of the law sealed us in our tomb; like the woman with the issue of blood, we had an issue of blood which after we had spent everything we had, we could not be cured of ourselves; like all those with physical infirmities, our spiritual senses were all lost when we sinned in Adam in the garden: we were born blind to Christ's glory, deaf to his word, not in our right mind, and impotent in our feet.

Yet, through the gospel, the Spirit of Christ works the wonder of grace which makes his people signs of what only God can do. He gives chosen sinners the word of life.

- Christ is our Life, therefore through his gospel, Christ says to us, Lazarus come forth!-- and now we have eternal life.
- Through Christ's blood our issue of blood is cured.
- He is the Light whereby we see,
- The Voice whereby we hear,
- Christ is our Wisdom whereby we speak and have the mind of Christ that we may that all things are freely given to us.
- Christ is our Strength whereby we walk after the Spirit and after righteousness.

When the Lord Jesus Christ, through his Spirit, through his gospel, effectually works in the sinner's heart, the Spirit purifies the conscience from dead works thus separating the believer from this world. He makes himself Sanctification unto us. We behold him as our only Sanctuary. He indeed, is our separation from this world. (Listen to sermon reference which can be found on Sermon Audio, titled: Because He Waited, Isaiah 8: 16-18.)

In our text, the Lord began this work through the word of truth, through the Spirit and he continues this work the same way. That is what he did in Iconium and therefore we read: **Acts 14: 1: And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed...3: Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord,**

Immediately, when the Lord works grace in the heart it is then that the believer's warfare begins. One of the first battles the believer is often faced with is among those who once found no fault with us at all. **Acts 14: 2: But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren...3: Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord.** What was it that caused the unbelieving Jews to stir up the unbelieving Gentiles against the brethren? It is because the gospel declares all who do not believe Christ to be just exactly alike no matter how hard we try to put a difference between ourselves.

Verse one says "a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed." The Greeks were heathen, idolaters, who never had the word of the Lord, who never had the law of Moses while, on the other hand, the Jews *had* the oracles of God. Yet, both the believing Jew and the believing Greek repented from the same thing. That is important to note. It means prior to God giving them faith to believe Christ, both Jew and Greek were in the same camp.

- (Philippians 3: 5-11.) The Jews turned from putting any confidence in the fact that they were circumcised the 8th day; likewise the Gentiles turned from putting any confidence in any ceremony which their fathers might have performed on their behalf. Declaring to all that no ceremony--even that given by the Lord, could make a sinner accepted of God.

- The Jews turned from putting any confidence in their natural ancestry or in their heritage; likewise the Greeks confessed that none of their earthly relations profited them before the Lord.
- When the Greeks turned from the wisdom of the world which they so delighted in and when the Jews turned from the vain confidence in *their knowledge* of the law and the prophets; they each confessed that sinners must be taught of the Lord in spirit and in truth.
- The Jews turned from putting any confidence in their former zeal which caused them to reject the Gentiles and likewise the Greeks turned from boasting in their zeal against the Jews. Both declaring that God only accepts those who come begging for mercy.
- The Jews turned from trusting in their outward obedience to the law of Moses; likewise, though the Greeks did not have the law of Moses, they were law unto themselves, but they ceased putting any confidence in an outward obedience to their laws. (Romans 2: 11-16.)

These believing Jews and Greeks confessed that though they exalted themselves over each other using these various religious forms, the reality was they were both the same--without Christ, having no hope and without God in the world. They repented and believed on Christ. They counted all the things they once considered gain, as loss for Christ. That that **might win Christ**--they confessed the only reward they were seeking was Christ. They confessed they wanted to be found of God in Christ, not having a righteousness of their own by their vain attempts at obeying the law, but that righteousness which is through the fidelity of Christ by faith in him.

By repenting and believing on Christ they confessed that **2 Corinthians 5: 19: God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation....21: For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.** They professed **Galatians 6: 14: But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. 15: For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. 16: And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.** They confessed that they were not of this world. This is what it is to be sanctified through the Spirit of God and through the belief of the truth.

Therefore, the unbelieving Jews and Gentiles who were of this world, who were of this world's religion, who yet put all their confidence in the work of their own hands, whose only means of separating themselves from others was by using those very things which the believers renounced as dung, hated them. So we read Acts 14: 2: **But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren...**

So seeing this is what the Lord began through the gospel we see that the believer will need Christ to continue to do something for us to keep us from this evil.

II. What the Lord continues to do through his gospel.

Acts 14: 3: Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. 4: But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.

A great multitude of unbelievers held with the Jews. Sin abounded. Sin had dominion over them. These refused to believe Christ, refused to believe the gospel preached by the apostles. They preferred the husks of falsehood, the heavy, burdensome yoke of Satan's taskmasters who made their lives bitter with hard bondage. They lived by the sword and died by the sword.

But be sure you catch the amazing grace of God actively working through this gospel. Because this very nature still abides in the old man within the believer...**Long time therefore abode Paul and Barnabas speaking boldly in the Lord.** And where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. Every time the gospel of Christ's perfect atonement was preached to these believers, Christ Jesus continued testifying of the word of his grace in their hearts saying, **Ro 6:14:...sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.** Through this gospel Christ continually testified in their hearts that they were signs and wonders of his grace, kings and priest unto God, so that they HELD WITH THE APOSTLES, rejoicing with Paul who said, **Ga 2:20: I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.**

Here is what I am saying: not only does the Lord Jesus Christ sanctify us by giving us the word of life in our hearts in the beginning, but once the Lord Jesus creates this division between the believer and the unbeliever, between our old man and the new, between the spirit and the flesh, he also continues to separate us, and he does it through this same word of his grace. **Acts 14: 3: Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands**

Hold your place here and let's compare this word in our Lord's intercessory prayer to what happened here in Iconium: **John 17: 14: I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.** Now compare this to **Acts 14: 1: And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake,** (V3: the Lord giving testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands) **that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.** The Lord Jesus Christ himself testified of the word of his grace by giving them the word in their hearts. Thus a great multitude, Jew and Greek were sanctified through the Holy Spirit and belief of the

truth. They were separated from the world by the grace of God who gave them faith to believe that Christ is indeed all their standing before God. Christ gave them the living word in their hearts. Thus the unbelieving Jews immediately hated them, because they were not of the world, even as Christ is not of the world.

Likewise, it is through the preaching of the gospel of Christ that our Savior is pleased to keep believers sanctified from the evil of this world. **John 17: 15: I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. 16: They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 17: Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. 18: As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. 19: And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.** Now compare that to why we are told that Paul and Barnabas abode with them in Acts 14: **3: Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. 4: But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.**

Application: It is of utmost importance that you attend to the preaching of the gospel for these two reasons. First, if you will be separated from the carnal heart of unbelief into his marvelous light and belief of the truth it will be through the word of truth, by the Holy Spirit, as Christ testifies of his word of grace. Secondly, if you and I will continue in the faith, separated unto Christ, kept from the evil of the ungodly, it will be the same way.

Illustration: When folks find out they have an illness like cancer, we seek the best physician, listen to all he say, and even take notes so to make sure we heed everything he says. Why is it that we take lightly the words of the great Physician? Is it not that we do not believe we are truly in need? Oh, that I would attend this word with the same diligence that I tend to those things that will profit me nothing!

We become threatened by the unbeliever--the one without and the one yet abiding in our old nature. By threatened I mean the tools, the tricks, the craftiness of the deceitful heart that creates those awful waves of concern in our hearts. It takes little things like high gas prices, busy work schedules, bodily infirmities, or family opposition. We become so easily distracted by those things and they hinder us from hearing the gospel of life and peace.

When such distractions arise we go one of two directions. If we cut back on hearing the word of the Lord boldly spoken then those little distractions become greater distractions and all the while it becomes more difficult to hear the only word whereby Christ settles our hearts.

But as he gives us grace to we press on, as he strengthens us to lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily besets us, we run, we pick up the pace as we ever look to Christ the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the

shameful death of the cross. It is not that the troubles go away, it is not that their ceases to be those who hold with the unbelievers, but Christ testifies in our hearts of his word of grace. Through his gospel he continually causes us behold him--the Sign and Wonder--from the LORD of hosts in Mt. Zion.

If we will be kept from the enemy of evil within and without, it will be by God's word of grace as it is issued to our hearts need by Christ Jesus himself through the Holy Spirit. It pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. He paid a great price to deliver this great news to your hearts. May he strengthen you to hold fast with the apostles: **2 Thessalonians 2: 13: But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: 14: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15: Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.**