

Teaching Acts 14:1-20

I would like to begin by sharing with you all a film that I seen many years ago and while preparing for my talk this morning I watched the film again, the film is entitled, “*Dr. David Livingstone*”. The film is about the inspirational story of Dr Livingstone’s expedition to Africa in the 19th century. He was a Christian missionary with a vision to serve God and share the love of Christ and free the African people from slavery. In his journal he records his narrow escape from a Lion his negotiations with an African chief who Livingston converted to Christianity, in turn the African chief converted his own tribe to Christianity and when British missionaries return to South Africa in 1859 they found the inhabitants holding Christian services and confessing their believe in Jesus Christ. . http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/livingstone_david.shtml

Livingstone continued his missionary work going deeper into central Africa which led him to lose contact with the world for 6 years until he was discovered by Stanley who greeted him with the legendary words “*Dr*

Livingstone I presume". Stanley stayed with Livingstone for 6 months in Africa before returning to England to write his famous book "*How I Found Livingstone*".

On the 1st of May 1873 Dr Livingstone died he was discovered by his followers not in his bed but kneeling beside it as if in prayer to God. Before his death he recorded in his journal "*all that I am I owe to Jesus Christ, revealed to me in His divine book*". Dr Livingstone evangelised the African nation just like the Apostle Paul 2000 years before on his missionary journeys by taking the Gospel of our Saviour Christ into unknown territory. <https://www.safaribookings.com/blog/david-livingstone>

As we continue with the Apostle Paul on his first missionary journey in Acts 14:1-20 we read of Paul and Barnabas exploring the unknown territory in Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. In these texts we read of persecution, paganism and perseverance, we will see how Paul and Barnabas persevered through fierce opposition to preach the good news of Jesus Christ, the word of God, the message of salvation and the message of Christ's grace. Grace was the subject of Paul's

preaching, God showed His grace by enabling Paul to heal the sick so that Paul could successfully carry out his mission to spread the Gospel.

In chapter 14:3 the text reads “so Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of His grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders”.¹

This is the message that the Apostle Paul took to many towns and cities that he could on his missionary journeys. Paul today gives us all the encouragement when we read of Paul’s account in Acts. If we are truly followers of Jesus and are filled with the Holy Spirit, we to can endure opposition or whatever life throws at us with courage and confidence. It will not be easy, but all of us can do it through the resurrection power of Christ. For example the Apostle Paul teaches in Philippians 4:13 “*I can do everything through Him who gives me strength*”.²

¹ NIV Study Bible, (Hodder & Stoughton Press, London, 1985)

² *Ibid*,

We pick up the narrative in Acts 14:1-7 where Paul and Barnabas arrive in the city of Iconium, which is now called Konya part of present day Turkey. As we have read previously in Acts 13 Paul's mission strategy was to go first to the Jewish synagogue which was central to Paul's mission to preach the Gospel there. And we can see from the very beginning in Acts 14 preaching the word of God is central to the church mission to bring people to Christ. The text tells us that Paul and Barnabas' preaching was so effective that large numbers of both Jews and Gentiles believed the Gospel.

This preaching of Paul was the catalyst that sparked the early church movement and church plants in which Christianity first took root. As we continue with the text we see the same pattern appearing that unbelieving Jews start to cause trouble for the missionaries. They began a smear campaign to poison the minds of the Gentiles, "*against the brothers*" (14:2).³ In spite of this persecution, Paul and Barnabas, "*spent considerable time in Iconium*" and God performed miraculous

³ *Ibid*,

wonders through them (14:3).⁴ However the city remained divided about them, “*Some sided with the Jews, others with the Apostles*” (14:4). Eventually the Jews had persuaded some of the gentiles not to listen to Paul and Barnabas teaching, and now they plotted to gather a mob to violently assault Paul and Barnabas to stone them to death. But they found out and left the city before they could be captured but they would not be silenced in the face of persecution,

Jesus had taught in Matthew 10:23 “*when you are persecuted in one place flee to another*” Both missionaries went to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derby where they continued to preach the good news of Christ in the surrounding cities.

The writer of Acts Luke, tells us of a miracle that occurred in Lystra which was the healing of a crippled man from birth (14:8). Paul had been speaking to the crowds and was somehow drawn to the faith of this crippled man. Paul looked directly at the man and called out, “*Stand up on your feet*” (14:10). At once the man

⁴ *Ibid*,

jumped up and began to walk. In this miracle and the language describing it we find several parallels to the story of Peter in Acts 3 healing the crippled beggar at the beautiful gate, lame from birth, looked directly at him, jumped up and began to walk. I believe that there are several reasons that these accounts of miracles are included in the narrative. Firstly throughout the narrative of Acts the early church is defining its identity bringing people to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And secondly it shows that God through the Holy Spirit and the healing power of Christ is with Paul and Barnabas each step of the way on their journey.

When the crowds saw what Paul had done (14:11-15) they thought that they were experiencing a divine visitation from the gods of Zeus and Hermes they named Barnabas Zeus and Paul Hermes because he was the chief speaker. The crowd's superstitious and fanatical behaviour comes down to a local legend that told of a supposed visit to the same area by Zeus and Hermes. They were, however not recognised by anyone except an old couple. So the crowds gathering at Lystra

where determined not to allow such an oversight to happen again. This is why they attempted to worship Paul and Barnabas they cried out in their native Lycaonian language “*The gods have come down to us in human form*” it is understandable that Paul did not understand what they were saying as he himself probably spoke the Greek language. It only dawned on them what was happening when the priest of Zeus brought bulls and wreaths, intending to offer sacrifices to them (14:13). As a response to this both Paul and Barnabas tore of their clothes, to express their horror at the peoples blasphemy and they rushed out into the crowd protesting against their intention shouting and insisting that they were human like them (14:15).

The text tells us in verse 15 of the sermon Paul preached to the Lystrans in the hope of stopping the Lystrans attempting to worship them. It is an example of how the Gospel was first introduced to a pagan audience the sermon differs in content from those delivered by Paul to Jews and Gentile followers of Judaism. When Paul preached to the Jews they had the

luxury of drawing on the Old Testament scriptures its history, prophecies and law. But with the pagans in Lystra Paul focused not on a scripture they did not know but on the natural world around them, which they did know and could see. Paul was bringing the good news he begged them to turn away from these worthless things of idolatrous worship to the living and true God. Paul spoke of the living God as the creator of heaven, earth and sea, and everything in them (15). This was a very simple form of natural theology. It means that nature itself bears witness to the existence of a creator God.

In verse 17 Paul went on to insist that the works of creation should lead us to understand that God is kind and merciful, the proof of God's kindness can be seen in his providing rain for the crops. God showed his presence through Christ and the good things we all enjoy.

Paul in these verses is reminding all of us today of the importance to give thanks for God's creation. The

beautiful sunrises and sunsets, the life giving nature of water, the beauty of the sky and mountains; and it is a message to each one of us to understand the importance of creation value. To appreciate the natural environment and to take action to prevent further environmental damage happening to God's creation of the earth.

When you get to know me as weeks go on you will find creation care is one of my passions. And I believe when you love and care for God's creation your understanding of God and his purpose and plans for all our lives is that he calls us to enter into a closer relationship with him through believe and faith in Jesus Christ. All of us will shortly stand up this morning and affirm our Christian faith in the words of the Apostle's creed, "*I Believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son our Lord. who was conceived by the Holy Spirit*". I believe each week when we recite the creed we are reminded of God's awesome power as creator and it will help us to connect better with the natural world around us, and it definitely

reminds me of God's power and creativity. The Psalmist in Psalm 8 gives us a beautiful poem written from the heart that reflects God's majesty that is displayed in creation. The heavens declare God's glory and the special place humanity has been given to be caretakers of looking after this beautiful blue planet earth. As Christians it is important to make this connection between nature and God revealed to us in Jesus Christ the word who became flesh and lived amongst us who died on the cross to provide the way for all of us to receive forgiveness.

The final verses of Acts 14 tells us that the Lyconians did not believe Paul they stoned him then dragged him out of the city and left him for dead. But Paul was ok he got up and went back into the city. The same is true today some people do not believe the Gospel but let us give thanks to missionaries like the Apostle Paul and Dr David Livingstone who gives us the example to preach the good news and if it is not accepted we follow our saviours words in Matthew 10:23 "*When you are persecuted in one place flee to another*". With this in

mind it is the churches mission and our mission to keep striving to share the Gospel of the good news of Christ.

AMEN