

Series: Turning the World Upside Down #3

The Challenge of the Church

Acts 14: 1-23

As we continue our study this morning, I want to remind us again of our text verse: [Acts 17:6](#) – [These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also](#). Clearly Paul, Barnabas, and the others were making a significant impact on the world around them. All were not pleased with their efforts, but their work was recognized everywhere they went.

The attitude surrounding our text verse for the series was one of anger and great displeasure. In every city Paul entered, he reached people for Christ, but he also made enemies. Many were happy with religion and worship as it was and they had no use for a man who was turning the world upside for Jesus. When people came to a saving knowledge of Christ, they abandoned the old form of religion for a relationship with Christ. This affected the followers of established religion, and in many cases it affected the income of those who profited from it.

Our text this morning deals with various challenges that Paul and Barnabas faced on their first missionary journey. We are thousands of years removed, but these challenges remain today. The people and circumstances are different, but we continue to deal with the same issues that Paul faced. If we are committed to turning the world upside down for Jesus, we might as well expect to encounter these challenges. We must learn to identify them and properly respond to them. I want to look in on the ministry of Paul and the [obstacles](#) he faced as we consider: [The Challenge of the Church](#).

I. The Challenge of Division (1-7)

A. The Presence of Division (2, 4) – [But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.](#) [4] [But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.](#) Paul had not gone looking to create division, but it quickly appeared. The Jews who refuted the teaching of Christ stirred up the Gentiles, creating doubt and division among them. Paul had been there but a short time and the city had become divided.

- One of the greatest challenges the church faces today is division. As far as I can tell, Fellowship enjoys unity, but that does not mean that division could not come in among us. I have dealt with it in the past. Division causes many problems within the church. If we are to be effective in reaching the lost for Christ, we must guard against the great challenge of division. [Mark 3:25](#) – [And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand.](#)

B. The Point of Division (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.* As was his normal practice, Paul entered the synagogue upon his arrival in Iconium and began to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. His preaching had an effect: a great multitude of Jews and Greeks believed. This was the point of division among the people. The Jews who rejected Jesus as the Messiah and the Gospel Paul preached, created division because of the message he preached. He was leading people away from organized religion unto the Truth.

- Often division comes about due to petty differences that will have no lasting effect in eternity. Many churches have split over trivial issues. We certainly must guard against allowing matters of personal opinion create division, but there is a greater challenge on the horizon. We are living in a day in which many have compromised truth for the approval and acceptance of men. Many have given in to the modern pressures of society and abandoned the truth of the Gospel.
- We are entering a time, even here in America, where the Gospel creates contention. If we are committed to stand upon the truth of God's Word, preaching Jesus as the only means of salvation and confronting behavior that is contrary to the Word, we can look for division. Society demands tolerance, even if tolerance demands rejection of God's Word.

C. The Patience in Division (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.* Division grew stronger each day, with men being forced to choose sides, but Paul was not deterred. Even in the midst of mounting opposition, Paul continued to preach the Gospel without compromise. He understood that all did not agree with his teaching, but he refused to abandon the message. He remained steadfast in his commitment to Christ.

- Society expects us to buckle under the pressures of our day. The enemy seeks to gain entrance among us. He desires to create division within the church. When it comes, we must remain committed to the cause of Christ. We cannot allow the bark of the enemy to create fear in our hearts. The cause is too great to abandon in an effort to please the world.

D. The Problem with Division (5-6) – *And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, [6] They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about:* The division eventually became so strong that the opposition desired to stone Paul and Barnabas. They were committed to putting an end to the preaching of Jesus. Realizing the danger they were in, Paul and Barnabas fled from Iconium to the surrounding region.

- Division had not ended Paul's ministry, but it had affected the believers in Iconium. The man of God had been forced to flee and the church suffered because of it. That is usually the case. The church, those who genuinely desire to serve the Lord, are usually the ones to suffer when division comes to a head and reaches the breaking point. This always bears a negative testimony for the church. We will never make a difference for Jesus when division is present!

I. The Challenge of Division (1-7)

II. The Challenge of Confusion (8-18) – I want to examine the events in Lystra and then make application regarding the challenge of confusion. Notice:

A. The Submission of Paul (8-9) – *And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: [9] The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed.* Keep in mind that Paul had just fled from Iconium, but when he arrives in Lystra he immediately seeks to be used of the Lord. His heart is in complete fellowship with Christ and he is sensitive to the Spirit. He encounters an impotent man who had never walked, and Paul perceived the man had faith to be healed. His life and ministry were totally surrendered to the will of God.

B. The Manifestation of Power (10) – *Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.* As Paul perceived the faith of this man, he commanded him to stand upon his feet, and he leaped and walked. Can you imagine how the people felt who knew this man? There could be no doubt that a miracle had been performed among them. The man wasn't just able to stand, he was like the lame at the Beautiful Gate, walking and leaping. God had manifested His mighty power through the obedience of Paul.

C. The Confusion of the People (11-18) – Upon seeing this great miracle, the people perceived Paul and Barnabas to be gods. The priest called for a sacrifice to be offered unto them for the power they had revealed. Paul and Barnabas had a difficult time convincing them that they possessed no power within themselves. This was all the power of God manifested in their lives so they might believe the Gospel.

➤ As we consider the events at Lystra, I am reminded that this challenge remains today. God has called some men who have surrendered to His will for their lives. They are sold out to the cause of Christ, being very sensitive to the leading of the Spirit. We do not experience many of the miracles that were prevalent through the ministry of the apostles, but God is still working today in the lives of people. He still heals sickness and disease. He still saves those who have lived wicked lives. He still restores homes that are on the verge of destruction. God's mighty power is revealed in many miraculous ways.

➤ However, we must avoid the challenge of confusion that was prevalent in Lystra. Many today focus more on a pastor or evangelist than they do the Lord. I rejoice in all the Lord does for us, but it seems many are focused more on receiving a miracle in their lives than worshipping Jesus. If we aren't very careful, our priorities will get out of order. The pastor didn't save you. He is not worthy of worship. Experiencing a touch of God is great, but we cannot place more emphasis on the works of God than we do Christ our Lord. He must be the focus and priority of our lives. If we are to reach the world, Jesus must be exalted above everything else!

I. The Challenge of Division (1-7)

II. The Challenge of Confusion (8-18)

III. The Challenge of Persecution (19-23)

A. The Reality of Persecution (19) – *And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.* Isn't that amazing? These people were ready to worship Paul and Barnabas as gods, and yet they were quickly influenced by those from Antioch and Iconium who were determined to silence Paul and his message. The people of Lystra stoned Paul and left him for dead.

▪ We have not experienced persecution like many have, but we can rest assured that Satan does not like those who are productive for the Lord. If we begin to make a difference in our community for Christ, persecution will come. We must be prepared and ready for it when it does. Paul suffered for serving the Lord, and if we are earnest in our service, we will face it as well.

B. The Resolve in Persecution (20-21) – *Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. [21] And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and*

Antioch. Stoned and left for dead, Paul refused to abandon his calling. He rose up, battered and beaten, and returned to the ministry. He departed to Derbe, preaching the Gospel, but he then returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, to those who desired to kill him.

- Difficulties and opposition will come, but when they do, we need the resolve Paul had. We must remain committed to the work of the Lord, even if we are despised and abused by the world. The Lord suffered greatly for our salvation. Many who have gone before us have as well. We cannot abandon Christ in our generation. If we refuse to stand for Him, who will?

C. The Reaction to Persecution (21-23) – And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, [22] Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. [23] And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. Paul didn't ride off into the sunset, seeking retirement or an easier line of work. He immediately resumed his ministry. His life had been changed when he met Christ on the Damascus road. He had been called to preach Jesus unto the lost, and he was determined to do that. He knew the church was greatly opposed and persecuted, and wanted to strengthen their faith and challenge them to continue for Christ!

- It isn't a matter of if opposition and adversity will come, but when. The question is: how will we react when it does. Will we be tempted to abandon the work because our feelings have been hurt? Will we listen to the voices of the world that say it isn't worth it? Or will we determine to strengthen fellow believers in their faith and continue to reach the lost for Christ? Persecution will cause a reaction of some sort. How will you respond?

Conclusion: We continue to face the same challenges Paul and Barnabas did. They sought the Lord and overcame each of these challenges. Do you possess the determination, resolve, and commitment they had? Is there a particular challenge you need to seek the Lord's help with today?

Maybe you are similar to the people in Lystra. You are looking in all the wrong places for guidance in your life. Maybe you are serving the gods of pleasure. Maybe you are depending upon your good works to merit acceptance to God. Jesus is the only way of salvation and eternal life. If you have never been saved, and He is speaking to you, come to Him today!