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"THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY COMPLETED"

Acts 14

INTRODUCTION:

We began the first missionary journey in Chapter 13 - in which the church was instructed to separate Barnabas and Saul, for the work. They were set apart by the church. They sailed to Cyprus and there was great success as they traveled the length of the island. And at Paphos they had an encounter with the governor and a sorcerer. And Paul moved on from that point and went up into Perga. And when he came to Antioch in Pisidia, V. 14 - he stood up in the synagogue and preached a memorable sermon. He recounted the history of Israel and then in V. 23, he unfolded the promise that the Saviour and the Messiah would come. And then he talked about the way that Jesus was treated - at the hands of Pilate's death, how he was raised from the dead. He had something to say about Psalm 16, to them. As a result of the beginning of this missionary journey, we saw that some of the early results - the last part of that chapter, some people gladly heard the word of God. Were interested in hearing more. And of course, there were others who came and stirred up strife against him. And they were expelled from the coast. And they had to move on and shake the dust from their feet. And they came to Iconium.

*Man, ask Why do doctors & nurses wear masks?
Some one else - so that if someone makes a mistake no one will know who did it? - Paul knows who spoke*

This is where we begin the continuation and the completion of the first missionary journey. We will see in Chapter 14, Paul and Barnabas ministering in three different cities - Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. In two of these cities they met with vicious and violent opposition. It is very important for us to see how they handled this. Because it is very likely that in your day, many of you and of us, may face the same kind of conditions. Violent opposition. And it is very thrilling to see how they handled this.

Dr. Theodore F. Adams in the Biblical Recorder, December, 1976, wrote an article on harmony or conflict. And he talked about how a pastor must keep his cool when problems arise. And he suggests ways to achieve and maintain church harmony, when differences arise. And he said often older problems may never fully be resolved. They may come to the forefront and changes may bring stress. He suggests that people need a chance to talk through their important problems. And pray for each other. And to do so in the spirit of love and fellowship. He said that people need to know each other and take a situation and come to an understanding.

One thing I noticed that he said was very helpful. No individual should come to a problem thinking that he has the ready-made answers. To solve all that is involved. I think this is very vital and very important. And this is the thing that Paul and his fellow laborers had to cope with, and face. These traveling preachers are going from one little settlement to another. And these settlements were wide spread. And some of these settlements had never had any regular pastors, or full-time churches. And they came in to stay awhile and to preach the Gospel. And win the lost. And then some kind of work would begin. And be organized.

There are about four ways that I can divide this chapter. Now I think this is very helpful - if you will follow this. This is something that I arranged myself in this chapter. Now you might want to do it another way. You might think of organizing it and the thoughts in some other direction. But follow along with me. First, there was rending - V. 1-7. Dividing. Splitting.

Second, there was reverencing - V. 8-20. Adoration. Honor.

Third, re-visiting - V. 21-26.

Fourth, reporting - V. 27-28.

Keep these four words - rending, reverencing, re-visiting, and reporting in mind. Now that will tie the mental things together.

I. RENDING - V. 1-7.

By this, we come - V. 1. And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went to the synagogue to speak. To the Jews, and they spoke to a great multitude. And both of the Jews, and also the Greeks - believed. Here was a pagan Gentile city. A strong colony of Jews. And they went there first. And they had the opportunity to speak. And it hit them like a ton of bricks. It jolted them. We'd say it made them sit up and take notice. Immediately great crowds believed.

Now the religious people had long met and gathered - going over the truth about God. A great deal of truth was available to them. But somehow their hearts had remained empty. These two missionaries declared the grace of God. And they believed and it made a tremendous change. And this change came immediately as they preached - boldly, they preached the word of his grace. And some believed.

V. 2 - There was opposition that was aroused. This is the rending - the dividing, the breaking apart. The tearing apart. The rupture that took place. The Greeks divided. Some of them stood with the missionaries.

Some of them stood with the Jews.

Wherever these men went, they brought discouraging, dividing forces. The men were cast into two opposite camps. The Gospel will not compromise. Therefore, they found themselves divided.

And the Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds, against the brethren. The Gentiles - trying to learn the truth about God. And there were certain

Jews that were unbelieving. The word is unpersuadable. They do not only disbelieve the Gospel - but they would not give it a chance, or even consider it. They stirred up - they poisoned the minds of the brethren.

Just how they did this, we are not told. We do not know.

But it was suttle opposition. No one knows exactly how the enemy is going to strike. We are not ignorant of all his devices. We know what the schemes of the Devil uses against us.

The Devil has a limited bag of tricks. From which he can operate.

And on any given occasion, there is an element of surprise in the Devil's work. And here is a clear case of it.

You let something good happen in the church. And I'll guarantee there will be an element of surprise - the Devil will step in and something will be all wrong about something that was alright.

These men were not met with the outright kind of opposition. But it was sort of a suttle, whispered, deceitful poisonous propaganda thrown against them.

V. 3 - Luke goes on with the brevity of the details and he says they preached the word of his grace.

V. 4 - But he said the multitude was divided. And there was the rendering. They were pulled apart, in this city divided. They preached with warmth and they put the issues right to the hearers - and there was something as they talked about the matter of salvation that was convincing.

We need that kind of preaching today, that these men were doing. Here is your sin - here is a God whom you must face someday. You are not ready now. A sinful man can never face a perfect God. He offers you salvation, a rich free gift, accept and be saved. Reject him and go to Hell.

Now that faces every man today. As usual, when the Lord began to save people, and the church began to get together and move - Satan stirred up trouble. The Jews said things which made many of the Gentiles turn against many of the missionaries. And the missionaries had given them many opportunities to serve and to speak. But when things are going fine - Satan stirs up trouble. And so on one side he puts a sinner and on the other side a saint. And the Jews begin to say things that made some of the Gentiles turn - and the whole city was divided. It was rend apart. This was the rending.

ill - Here is a woman who accepts Christ. She invites her husband to come to church with her - but he refuses. They live together for years - but there is a rending. There is a division. There is a stubborn will that refuses. One is living with Christ - and the other is living against Christ.

Here is a young person who has many friends. He is converted. Now his other friends give him up - they will have nothing to do with him. Christ has divided them. There is a rending apart.

Here is a woman who accepts Christ but her husband makes it hard for her. Then she says, I want peace in my family. And she gives up Christ and her church. She stays at home with him. She goes to the places of the world with him on Sunday. Her religion means nothing to her and she has no influences over her husband.

Dr. W. A. Criswell tells of a young Jew who came to his church in Dallas.

And who finally gave his heart to Christ. However, the young man would not come for baptism. He felt that this would be the final break with his family. One day he came and he said, preacher, I am ready for the baptism. I will go all the way with Christ but it will cost me my family. But I must follow Christ. Right now they are having a little funeral service for me at my house. Counting me as dead. It breaks my heart to lose them, but I must follow Christ whatever the cost.

Yes, Christ divides. The eternal divider, puts the sheep on one side and the goats on the other. That is the story over and over again. You remember that story of Lazarus and the rich man. The rich man wanted Lazarus to leave Heaven for a few minutes and come down to Hell and bring him a few drops of water. But Abraham said there is a great gulf fixed between Heaven and Hell. When you go to one place - you cannot get over to the other place.

Dr. A. R. Scarborough tells of preaching on that subject one night. How that there is a gulf fixed. An unsaved man in the congregation with his wife, who was a Christian, drove home to the ranch. He did not speak a word. That night they went to bed. But the rancher could not sleep. At 10 o'clock, and at 2 o'clock the wife said to her husband - what is the matter. He replied wife, we have been living together for 40 years - we have been very happy. And I don't want to be separated from you. The preacher said there was a great gulf out yonder in eternity - is it true.

Yes, she said - I will read it to you out of the Bible. She got out of bed and she read the story from the Bible. Oh wife, he said, I want to get on your side of the gulf. They knelt, and prayed together and he gave his heart to Christ. The next day he came and made a profession and united with the church. He said, bless God, I am on my wife's side of the gulf.

Some day, some of you people who are listening to me will leave your office, or your store, or your shop for the last time. Some of you housewives will clean your house for the last time. You will cook the last meal. You will wash the last dish. You will lie down to sleep for the last time. It is going to creep up on you and soon your loved ones will stand by your bedside and they will say - he is gone. Or she is gone. Someone will make funeral arrangements for your body, to be carried to a funeral parlor, and then you'll be carried to the cemetery. The preacher will read the lines of committing this body to the grave to await the resurrection morning. Where will your soul be? Which side of the great gulf will you be on? Wouldn't it be wise for you to get on Christ's side - to forgive your sins. And leave your sins behind.

Now in the closing part of V. 5 - they begin to talk about stoning Paul. V. 6 and 7 - Paul moved on to Derbe, and to Lystra. In another region - that was not too far away.

II. REVERENCING - V. 8-20

So in the last city - things were divided. And the rending took place.

Now we come to a new city - V. 8 - in Lystra they are confronted immediately with a strange incident. A certain man, crippled in his feet from birth. Who had never walked.

Now the thing about it - when the missionaries came to this town, they didn't say let's form a committee, or let's get the chamber of commerce report on the city's population. And they didn't divide the city up in squares in the evangelistic or systematic way. They had no plans other than to do what God sent them to do.

So they walked right into the marketplace and they proclaimed the Gospel and God began the work in an amazing way - for there was a man laying from birth who had never walked. And evidently this man was well known through the city. And the man listened to Paul preach. And there was power in his preaching.

We are going to see a miracle here. Here is a man who has been helpless all of his life.

V. 9 - He heard Paul, and he took in the preaching. And Paul had a feeling that this man had faith that he was going to be healed of God.

V. 10 - And Paul said in a loud voice - stand upright on thy feet. And he walked. The man stood. The Lord always completes the job. He had never walked in his life. He had made the effort. And the key was obedience.

Did you know the Christian life always works that way. It doesn't make any difference whether the problem is physical, or spiritual. You are going to be held in it's bondage until you begin to obey the word of God. When you make the effort to obey - God will set you free.

But God will never move until you obey. That is the way faith works. Most people are kept from seeing God at work in their lives because they keep waiting for God to do something in order for them to believe. But God has already done all he is going to do. And when you believe, he gives you that power.

V. 11-18 - Is the matter of reverencing, adoration. They had a profound respect and a false interpretation of the miracle that had happened.

The mighty parable of this is that many people who have been spiritually lame until they take the first step toward God. And this miracle cracked the city

wide open.

I want you to see what immediately took place here. Paul and Barnabas, the missionaries in the midst.

They felt that the miracle was in their presence could only be done by one of their Gods.

V. 12 - They called Barnabas Jupiter. And Paul Mercury. Every extraordinary work of nature was worshipped by those pagans. Their deity had assumed human form.

So here was Jupiter Barnabas and here is Mercury, the messenger of Gods.

V. 13 - Even the priests were coming down the streets with oxen and garlands around his horns. And they were going on their way to sacrifice with the people. There was such reverence for the missionaries.

The enemy was at work. Without wasting a moment, the Devil managed to pervert the situation that these people would not hear the word. They twisted and distorted the people's idea of God. Why, the Gods have come down to live with us. The Greek name they gave - Jermes, the Roman names were Jupiter and Mercury. Perhaps because Barnabas had a long beard and looked dignified, they called him Jupiter. Or because Paul was small, they called him Mercury. He was a spokesman for the Gods. What a subtle attack. They welcomed them as the Gods - V. 13.

That sounds very much like Capt. James Cook, of the British Navy, on the shores of Hawaii. In the welcome that he received of the God Lono. And his men were given anything and everything they wanted. They were attended too day and night. In the wax museum there, you can see this drama carried out.

Of the landing, and how they attended them. And then one day they were about to launch their boats and return to their ship. A native who was angry with Capt. Cook for some reason, grabbed hold of him. Forgetting that he was supposedly a God. And he swung at him and knocked him down. The native hit him on the head with a club. And the Captain groaned and when the natives heard this - one of them cried out, he groans, he is not a God. And they fell on him and killed him.

You can see a memorial at the sight today.

In Lystra, these missionaries had a perfect opportunity to take over the city on their own terms. That is, flattery - if they had thought about popularity. The weapon of the Devil which he employs most successfully. You know how people want popularity in the church today. It is the same old story.

If you want to know how to reach people who are not interested in the Gospel and who know nothing of the Scripture, who have not been to church, then you have to take the approach that Paul did here. About nature. When he went to the Jews he started with the Scriptures because they already knew them.

But in V. 15 - Paul begins to show that behind creation, there is a living God. He divides these pagans and idols. They had Gods of water, trees, rocks, speech, sex, life. All sorts of Gods. He tells them they haven't really seen the living God - the one God. They were interested in the God of rain, the sun, and the seed time.

It is said that sailing on the Mediterranean, Napoleon and a group were discussing God. Some in the group were trying to eliminate God altogether. Napoleon had been silent. And at the end of the talk, he lifted a hand and pointed at the sea and the sky. And he said, who made all of this.

Sometimes we would do well to look at the world and remember the God who made all of this. And Paul said, do not think we are just men. I want to talk to you about a living God, a universal creator. And he is constantly at work in the universe.

V. 16 - He points out that men have three choices. That God is responsible for this. This is the problem of evil among men. Which is constant. Why does he allow evil, injustice, and war. There are people today who say, why doesn't God stop all of the war. Well, he could. But if he did - he would take away your freedom of choice. You have a choice between two possible routes. God has given us that very power.

V. 17 - He says God will not allow evil to go too far. And he said that in V. 18 - as he talks about restraint, he says surely evil may be tied if it was unrestrained - the whole universe would be destroyed. God has restrained it and he has given rain and fruit. This is the work of Christianity - it restrains people from evil. What a grand thing Christianity is. What on earth is comparable to it.

V. 19 - Stoning. Some of the ones that followed Paul to this city and told all kind of tales about them - what had happened. And dragged them out of the city, supposing that he was dead.

This time the Devil falls back on his old reliable - violence. And he condoned the stoning of the person who would be his helper and benefactor.

Paul was stoned - not with drugs - but with sharp hard rocks that cut his body, bruised him, crushed him. And they dragged him outside the city gates and threw him on the rubbish heap. Perhaps this is what Paul wrote about in Gal. 6:17.

When he received those marks on his body - he wrote about. I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

V. 20 - You take a good look at this. Look how these people changed. One day they were willing to fall down and worship (Paul as a God.) And the next day, they are ready to (put him to death.) Such is the power of tale bearing and gossip.

A man was going about doing good work. And here is a group that began to talk about him everywhere, and they passed the tale around, and it gets larger. Did you know this is one of the big faults of Christians today. And the Devil is behind it. Poor old Paul, somebody said, he was a good man - he was too zealous. If he had just toned down his preaching, if he had just bowed and scraped to these people, then he would still be alive. People stir a little and they groaned at his feet.

And what is so interesting here.

And some of these Devils that have turned on Paul, they are sitting by. And they were waiting for him to be buried. They were waiting for the funeral here in V. 20. Perhaps they were talking about calling the undertaker.

Suddenly Paul sits up and says, hold the undertaker. You are not going to bury Paul yet. And God restores him. Was he dead. The Scripture says, supposing him to be dead. And they dragged him out of the city.

Well, Luke, being a doctor had medical interests. And Paul - Luke was satisfied had not died, but was near death. And somehow God restored him. And the next day, he went on his way to Derbe - V. 20.

III. RE-VISITING - V. 21-26

V. 21
What a tremendous evidence occurs - V. 21. They had expelled him from Antioch, Pisidia, and threatened him in Iconium, and stoned him in Lystra. But when God raised Paul up, he goes right back to the same city to strengthen the disciples. There are always some who will believe and there are always some who will follow the Devil. That kind of courage comes only by trust in the living God. It is the only way that the preaching of the Gospel can keep going. The confidence that God is going with them. It was essential in the life of the church. That he gathered the disciples and ministered to them.

The Christian life is more than being converted. It is growing in Christ.

It is going on to be what God intended you to be in Christ. That is what is involved.

Paul could have crossed the mountain range and been back home within a short time. But he decided not to take the easy way.

V. 22
First, he stopped by to confirm these Christians - re-establish or better to give further support. It was the confirmation of his own Gospel. He saw its power and how it was growing, and it convinced him of his value. He urged them to continue in the faith. He instructed them in their Christian duty, and their faith. They had just emerged from heathenism.

You don't put new born chicks in an ice box. You don't put new born members in the kingdom of God out in the cold. You give them duties, responsibility, and enlist them and encourage them. You pray for them. You never discourage them.

Next he exhorted them. He strengthened them. He helped them to continue in the faith. And this was done by an appeal through his example. I think he went back

to the Old Testament record, and men of God lived by faith, and how God blessed them in the long ago. He says, look about in your city. There are idols everywhere.

23
Did you know cities never change. There are idols all over this city of Chesapeake - idols of lust, idols of sin, idols of evil women, idols of wrong intention. These idols are all over the city. And Paul stressed that the victory would be there's. And lastly, he organized. He organized these churches. They needed some leaders - some preachers and teachers. And so he organized them in a special way. And every church prepared in fasting. And finally, they prayed and committed the people to the Lord.

IV. REPORTING - V. 27-28

These final two verses, he gathered the church. He rehearsed all that God had done. He told of the open doors. And they stayed in the church and talked of the missionary thrills of that first journey.

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V. 27 is the account of a great missionary meeting. And it had penetrating power. And it is so today. I think this is what has a part in our Foreign Mission Offering every year. It is an exciting time. They saw the stars of Paul. They heard the marvelous stories of the people who had come to Christ. They heard Paul talk - how he went into the city. And he never run away from his task. No matter how hostile the crowd.

John Wesley gave this advice - always look a mob in the face. Paul was never braver. They tried to murder him. But he kept on preaching with the honesty that he had in Jesus Christ.

John Wesley put it - no man ever went to Heaven alone. He either found friends or made them. And that was the thing that Paul and Barnabas tried to do.

This is the right idea of Christian service. Not for an honor or a prestige. But from the conviction that we are tools in the hands of God.

I think the Pastor must have announced a special meeting and said - here are these missionaries we sent out. We have heard wonderful things of their work. They will be here in person and they will tell us. And I think every church member wanted to be present to hear that. That must have been a wonderful meeting - when the spirit said - separate us Paul and Barnabas.

It also must have been a thrilling meeting when Paul and Barnabas came back. What did they talk about - what did they tell the church.

Barnabas, perhaps made a short talk and perhaps left most of the story for Paul. He told what the Lord had done for them. He rehearsed all the events. He thanked the church for prayer, and money to carry on.

Let me tell you two or three things --

First, the missionary enterprise is right. I would say that every missionary organization in our church is right. It is not a commercial affair but it is an enterprise and it is right. The missionary enterprise demands our prayers. Every true missionary desires the prayers of the church.

The missionary enterprise is the cause of the church. They gathered the church together. Not just a few on the side or a half dozen, or a handful of officers.

Next, the missionary enterprise has a history worth relating. The missionaries rehearsed the things that God hath done. And the history is more interesting than the triumphants of the Gospel.

Lastly, the missionary enterprise is under the direction of God. Paul traced it all to the success of God. God opened the doors to the Gentiles.

In concluding the report, I think Paul must have said to the church we are now ready to go again - anywhere for Jesus. The first missionary journey had been completed.

Now what do you do today. You say, I work six days a week. And on Sunday, I might send a little money to church. Or you might say, well, so and so is not very cordial to me so I'll quit church. Or somebody left my name out of a program once, so I'll be in a huff about that. Or, I don't like the Pastor. Or I don't think much of the Deacons. Or I don't like the choir. So I am going to stay home. I am not going to darken the door of the church again.

Let me tell you something. Your life is not made up of service. But of excuses. And all that you will have to place at the feet of Jesus will be a bundle of excuses. There will be no sheeves when you get to Heaven.

Paul Harvey told a story about a man and his wife, on a farm in Minnesota. The woman was spiritual - god-fearing. The man wouldn't go to church. It was Christmas. No matter whether Jesus came in the flesh - he wasn't interested. Or a little baby in a manger in Bethlehem on Christmas Eve. The sad wife, on Christmas eve went off to church. She backed the car out and went to town. It began to snow. Her husband sat by the fireplace reading a newspaper. The countryside was engulfed in snow. It was so heavy that a flock of Canadian snow

geese flying South got caught in the blizzard. Their wings iced over and they were looking for some place to rest. And this little farm house was a place where they came down. The light from the window reflected from the window to the snow and looked like a lake. The man heard the flump, flump, flump. And the man went outside to look and he saw the flock of geese. They had stunned themselves and were lying in the snow flopping around semi-conscious. Being a human person - he said, I'll save them. He got his boots on, went out to the barn, opened the door and turned the light on. Gathered some straw, they wouldn't follow. He put some grain out - some food - but they wouldn't go into the barn. He started to catch one or pick one up - but he couldn't do it. He said, I'm not trying to hurt you. I am trying to save you - I want to help you. In his frustration, he began to think about that thing. He said, the only way that I could let them know that I wasn't going to harm them was to be able to speak their language. If I could just tell them. And about that time the familiar phrase of the old Christmas hymn - Oh, Little Town Of Bethlehem came and he listened to that. And he thought about the wonders of God. And how he has been fighting against God and God had been trying to save him. And the man fell on his knees - right in the snow, and prayed God forgive me for ever doubting. God had come in the flesh. So you've got to believe that God came in Jesus Christ. And this was the thing that Paul was trying to get across.