

1. The appointed means of faith is the preaching of the gospel
 - a. Iconium – Galatian region, 90 miles SE of Antioch; largely Greek, rather than Roman
 - b. Their strategy continues to be to go to those with a background in God’s relationship with Israel first (synagogue)
 - c. They spoke “so that” a “great multitude” believed, both Jews and Greeks
 - i. The appointed means by which people believe the gospel is solely the preaching of the gospel, the Word of God
 - ii. Speaking, then, is vital to people believing
 1. Love is the motive, but speaking is the means
 2. Acts of love, without the loving act of speaking the truth, is not the means of faith
2. The preaching of the gospel brings jealousy again
 - a. Both Jews and Greeks – an unlikely alliance considering idols
 - i. Greeks worshipped many gods through many idols
 - ii. To the Jews, idolatry was the greatest blasphemy
 - iii. “The enemy of my enemy is my friend”
 1. This shows that their greatest hatred was reserved for the gospel of grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone
 - b. This is a power struggle – power over fundamental views of reality – what is Real, ultimate, absolute
 - i. Is it any wonder that it is the powerful who often side against the gospel?
 - ii. They have power to lose – influence and “righteousness” which becomes meaningless in the light of God’s grace
3. This time they stayed longer BECAUSE of the division and the danger to the believers
 - a. They were still speaking boldly – the implications of denying or receiving the gospel
 - i. God was testifying to the “message of grace”
 1. By signs and wonders
 - a. Remember, signs and wonders are not the gospel – they verify the message of the authority of Jesus over all things
 2. Thus, they are “witnesses” of the authority of Jesus
 - a. But they are not the goal nor the essence of Christianity
 - ii. The message, speaking boldly, is the purpose, the point, and the power of God’s Spirit
 1. Note that Paul and Barnabas stayed in Iconium BECAUSE of the increased opposition
 2. They were debating for the truth, battling for the hearts and minds of men, laboring to persuade them that the gospel is true so that they might believe and be justified and reconciled with God
 3. Luke 16:14-16 – Jesus said the same things to the Pharisees who sought to “justify themselves before men” as “detestable to God” and “urged men to enter the kingdom of God” through Himself
 - b. Yet, the city was still divided
 - i. Not ethnically, but philosophically – there were Jews and Greeks on both sides
 - ii. The division was around the person of Jesus and if He truly was capable of justifying sinners
 - c. The jealousy finally turned violent...again
 - i. There was a plot to harm and stone the apostles
 - ii. It has progressed from banishment to execution
4. Fleeing Under Violent Persecution Spreads the Gospel

- a. They fled the violent persecution as they could
 - i. To Lycaonia region – Lystra, Derbe, and other areas around there
 - 1. This statement is the first which turned famed archeologist Sir William Ramsey to believe that Acts is an accurate historical record:
 - 2. Ramsey uncovered an ancient boundary stone which indicated – Lystra and Derbe were only in Lycaonia from 37AD to 72AD – both before and after that timeframe, they were in different regions (Phrygia and Lycaonia) – Luke is an eyewitness narrator, not a later editor/writer
 - ii. These churches are the Galatian churches to which the letter of Paul was written
 - 1. The issue of Judiazers, or returning to the Law as our means of justification, in whole or partially, continued to be an issue
 - 2. Many in Galatia were accepting this half-gospel because to fight it was to bring on suffering from the Jewish and Pagan powers of the city
 - 3. Thus, Paul went back and “encouraged them in the faith, saying that through much suffering we must enter the Kingdom of God” (v22)

5. God Vindicates the Message Through Miraculous Works

- a. Healing of a man born lame
 - i. Emphasis on his “powerlessness”
 - 1. “in his feet”
 - 2. “sitting”
 - 3. “from birth”
- b. Recognition of his faith
 - i. First, this healing is not primary, but secondary to the preaching of the gospel – Paul was preaching the gospel and this man was listening to “the speaking of Paul”
 - ii. Paul “stared at him as he was listening” and “beheld the faith to be healed”
 - 1. I’m not sure what that would look like, but Paul recognized in this man’s demeanor the belief that Jesus had the authority to make him well...and he hoped.
- c. Paul then commanded him to “get straight up” – and he “leapt up and was walking”
 - i. He leaped! That’s faith, my friends. He had never walked.
 - ii. He “was walking” – I love Luke’s casual explanation: this guy kept walking, didn’t stop, to feel how to walk, not again, but for the first time, he could move himself
- d. These show that this isn’t like the charlatan “healers” of today, who find invisible maladies that cannot be verified, subjective disabilities that can be claimed to be “better”
 - i. This man had never walked – and he ended up leaping, up straight, and walking around
 - ii. This demonstration of authority of Jesus impressed the Lystrans
- e. Also, Luke is connecting the authority of Christ through Peter and the authority of Christ through Paul
 - i. This is like the healing of the lame man in Jerusalem (Acts 3) – though one was Jewish and one was Greek – and it also lends itself to the common conflation of God’s work through His people: the healing is conflated with the healer
 - ii. Peter: “Why do you look at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made this man walk?...The God of Abraham...glorified his servant, Jesus, whom you delivered over to be crucified...You killed the Holy One...God raised him up...By his name, by faith in His name, this man has been made strong, and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this complete wholeness in your presence”

6. The Human Heart Assumes That it Can Fit Jesus Into Its Own Worldview

- a. The people assumed that Barnabas must be Zeus and Paul must be Hermes

- i. Paul was assumed to be Hermes because he was seen to be the “chief speaker” between them
 - ii. The Greek legends are that Hermes was Zeus’s son and was the herald of the gods from Mt. Olympus.
 - 1. This could have been any pagan town, but Lystra is specifically mentioned in the poet Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, a collection of legends from Roman antiquity, written only a generation before (Ovid lived from 43BC-17AD)
 - a. He was a Roman poet, so his story names them as Jupiter and Mercury, but their Greek equivalents are Zeus and Hermes
 - i. The people of Lycaonia were more Greek than Roman, thus used these names instead, or Luke interprets them for Theophilus, and they had local names for them
 - b. The legend is that Lystra was a city which Zeus and Hermes had visited in the past, disguised as ordinary peasants, knocked door to door for shelter among the rich people of the town, but were turned away by all until they came to a poor old couple, named Philemon and Baucis, outside of the town, living in a rustic cottage who received them for the night and fed them. When Baucis recognized that they were gods (Mercury’s cup was always full of wine even though she had been refilling it), they revered them. In the morning, the gods took them up the mountain and told them not to turn back until they reached the summit. Then, they showed them that they had flooded the town, but turned their little hovel into a great temple with a glittering golden roof and made them priests.
 - c. It’s a fable about the importance of hospitality, possibly rooted in the Jewish story of Lot and his family, but was then taken to great lengths to deify Paul and Barnabas as the same Zeus and Hermes which had come earlier to test them.
 - iii. The townspeople assumed that this was test #2, and they weren’t about to fail it again, so assumed that Paul must be Hermes, since he did most of the talking, and thus Barnabas must be Zeus
 - iv. This is an example of syncretism – the blending of Christian doctrine with local beliefs and values
 - I. A modern equivalent is Mormonism, a legend of the past written by Joseph Smith who took Christianity and syncretized it with the common worldview of spiritualism, mysticism, and treasure-seeking of his day and made a fraudulent and completely different worldview than the gospel
- b. Language barrier – Lycaonian was not a language that Paul & Barnabas understood, *and the Holy Spirit did not give them an interpretation in the moment*
 - i. When the people shouted out their assumptions, the apostles didn’t understand – they probably assumed it was joyous praise of Jesus...but it wasn’t
 - 1. They had to interpret what they saw and respond accordingly
 - 2. Cross-cultural preaching is not an easy work
7. It is a Catastrophe When People Try to Fit the Gospel into Their Worldview
- a. When they realized what was happening, they tear their clothes – an objective demonstration of blasphemy
 - i. They take this misunderstanding VERY seriously, and want others to see the same danger
 - b. They clarify their own weakness, rather than play up their own power
 - i. “We are men with the same kind of passions as you have”
 - 1. They are not special, and certainly not deities

- a. The comparison is between the nature of God and the nature of man here – and P & B are proclaiming that they have not divine nature at all, but are mere men
- 2. The gospel is the proclamation of God’s great grace towards “men of passions” and weakness - of the authority and power of God through Christ Jesus alone – not the power of special men
- 3. This links Paul, again, to Peter in Acts 10, when Cornelius tried to worship him, saying, “Get off the ground! I am just a mortal like you.” when the lame man who was healed tried to worship Peter in Jerusalem

8. The Gospel Demands an Entirely New Paradigm

- a. Paul preaches to a people who don’t respect the Scriptures
 - i. What we have here is an example of how Paul altered the presentation of the gospel to a purely Gentile audience with no background nor respect for the Old Testament
- b. He had to go all the way back to the beginning of God’s revelation: Creation and Conscience
 - i. Objective, “we bring you good news”
 - ii. Reason: “so that you should turn”
 - 1. “from these worthless things” (idols, pagan deities)
 - a. He calls their beliefs “worthless” or “empty and useless”
 - i. The common OT revelation of idols
 - ii. 1 Sam 12:21; Jer 14:22; Isa 44:9; 45:20; 46:7
 - b. What Paul later reminded the Thessalonians that they had turned from (1 Thess 1:9) and the Corinthians that idols are “nothings” (1 Cor 8:4)
 - iii. Creation: “to the living God who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all that is in them”
 - 1. That is, He is superior to Zeus (heavens), Gaea (earth), Poseidon (sea), and all the rest (all the inhabitants)
 - iv. Cause: “He formerly let all the nations go their own way”
 - 1. See Romans 1
 - v. Conscience: “yet, he did not leave them without witness in what has been made”
 - 1. His providence
 - 2. His power
 - 3. He alone (monotheism) is sovereign and He alone is good
- c. Yet, it was difficult to turn them from their worldview/belief/desires
 - i. “with great difficulty they kept them from sacrificing to them”

9. The people were easily convinced to hate the messengers of the gospel

- a. The opponents from Antioch and Iconium come and persuade the people that Paul and Barnabas are dangerous
 - i. Most likely they used the pagan legend to persuade them that Paul had offended Zeus and Hermes again, by misrepresenting them, and they were in danger of being destroyed if they did not act
- b. They dragged Paul out of the city and stoned him
 - i. They took him out of the city – they want NOTHING to do with him
 - ii. They killed him – so they supposed
 - 1. The violent men from Iconium had learned not to give a warning

10. Nothing Happens Outside the Sovereign Ordination of God

- a. Yet Paul survives, by the grace of God
- b. You won’t die until God ordains that you do – no matter how bad it may appear
- c. You do not have to fear death because of this
 - i. Paul got up and WENT BACK TO THE CITY which had just rejected and stoned him

ii. This sovereignty of God gave him great boldness

Conclusion:

The gospel will bring division, not the division of ethnicity or of nationality, but of ideas and values. It demands that everything one values and believes and does come under the authority of Jesus and nothing else. And it demands this of all people in all places in all times from all backgrounds. And, as Luke has shown us before, even with the greatest of persecution and hatred against it, it is unstoppable because God is the one working, and He is unstoppable.