

THE BIG IDEA: The gospel is enough.

The Take-Off

There's an event that's been around for ages that all of us have experienced at some time or another. It's taken on many forms over the years and has changed in style, but it's still the same event and it'll probably never change.

It's an event that is exciting for one participant and can be torture for the others, and as soon as I tell you what the event is, you're all going to slap your foreheads in kind of an "oh yeah!" agreement.

Are you ready?

The universal, worldwide event that leads to either laughter or tears is...

The sharing of vacation pictures.

If you were the one that went, you love it! if you were the one who didn't, you smile through clenched jaw because you're thinking of all the work you were doing while they were off playing.

I still remember the slideshows that my grandparents would have. My mom would pinch us if we groaned as we looked at the 30th picture of the same mountain from the same national park.

It. Was. Brutal.

The reason they were so boring was because we had no emotional attachment to the images. We wish we did, because we wish we'd have been away, too!

I'm hoping this morning doesn't become that for you, but the chapter we'll be looking at in Acts is basically like pictures from a trip.

The 2 men that took the trip - Barnabas and Saul - were set apart in Acts 13 to go preach the gospel. This week we'll read in Acts 14 about some of what they experienced when they were.

We'll talk through three sections of the chapter - kind of like 3 different snapshots of their trip. So, don't moan and groan or else someone near you could pinch you!

Let's start with snapshot #1:

1. The gospel isn't always exclusive enough

The first picture was taken at a stop that Barnabas and Paul made in a place named Iconium

Love the progression of events here:

- as usual, they went to the synagogue (v. 1) // they were men of faithful habits
- they were effective (v. 1) // they practiced one of our core values (We value **engaging communication** and expect the clear, relevant presentation of Scripture to speak life to a dying culture.)
- they were opposed (v. 2) // Why? Because the Jews AND Gentiles believed and some Jews didn't like it

We can't be surprised when the effectiveness of the gospel causes some to refuse it

And how did Paul and Barnabas react to this opposition?

Verse 3 says they "spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord"

What do we learn here in the first snapshot?

We learn that:

- The gospel isn't always exclusive enough, and that
- The religious hate this, because
- The religious love boundaries, because
- Boundaries keep others out

And how are we to respond to religious people who tell us to stop letting "those kind" into a church full of the gospel? **We are to stand strong, and long, and preach boldly!**

Eventually, the two men did leave in order to escape a plot to kill them, and they found themselves in Lystra, the location of the next photo shoot that would provide us with our second snapshot.

2. The gospel isn't always inclusive enough

60 miles south of the mob trying to stone them they "continued to preach the good news" (v. 7)

Even though they fled the mob, they didn't quit preaching the very gospel that had placed them in danger, and here they found danger again, but for the exact OPPOSITE reason as the first snapshot

Here, a man is healed and the crowd anoints Paul and Barnabas as Greek gods in human form

They went so far that the priest of Zeus brought animals to sacrifice to the 2 preachers (v. 13)

Paul and Barnabas finally convinced them to stop, but just barely (v. 18)

So at this point, you have a bunch of Greek god-worshippers who are thrilled with the power of God but don't really like the exclusivity of the gospel

And so, when the Jews from the first place come to cause trouble, the crowd is won over and tries to kill Paul.

Why? Because:

- The gospel isn't always inclusive enough, and we see that
- The rebellious hate this, because
- The rebellious hate boundaries, because
- Boundaries can squeeze us out

If you're feeling a little like the gospel is a lose-lose proposition and that we'll always be ticking someone off, then you're beginning to understand a little of what Paul was saying in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16

- God spreads the gospel through us (v. 14)
- We are the aroma of Christ (v. 15) // We smell like something
- Some love the smell, some hate the smell (v. 16) // The gospel polarizes people
- The good news isn't always good news, and even Paul struggled with that (v. 16) // Who is equal to such a task?

And so the temptation will always be to compromise, to preach a less polarizing gospel.

But what did Paul do in Lystra after he had been stoned? Did he give up? Did he preach something different?

Verse 20 says he got up and **went back into the city** and then headed out the next day to preach again in Derbe, a town about 60 miles away before **returning to the same cities where he had almost been killed.** (v. 21)

Now, before we look at the last snapshot, let me share a real-world example of what these first 2 points look like. Erwin McManus, pastor of Mosaic Church in LA, tells about a lesbian couple who attended their church and loved it. Some in the church struggled with that - the gospel isn't always exclusive enough to keep out the people who can make us uncomfortable.

At some point the church was going on a married couples retreat and this couple signed up. Erwin sat down and explained why they would not be allowed to attend because Biblically the church believed marriage was between one man and one woman and as a result the lesbian couple left the church - the gospel isn't always inclusive enough and it's standards - boundaries, if you will - can squeeze all of us and make us uncomfortable

If you're here at The Gathering long enough and we preach the gospel well enough, at some point you will be on one of those ends. Either you will be uncomfortable with who is in here or you will be uncomfortable with what's in you and want to get out of here.

The religious and the rebellious will never be big fans of the gospel until they realize the power of our final point.

3. The gospel is always sufficient enough

I love verse 22: Paul and Barnabas encouraged the disciples to remain true to the faith

- Don't be surprised by the hard things (v. 22)
 - Basically, they are saying that the gospel is worth it
- Later when he wrote the second letter to the Corinthians, Paul echoed this in 2 Corinthians 3:5-6
- Yes we tick people off everywhere we preach, but God has made us competent (literally means "effective") (v. 5)
 - God has given us a new covenant (v. 6) and that is enough

Do we want people to like us? Yes!

Do we want to experience hard times? No!

But for the right things - and there is no more right thing than the gospel - will we take the hard times? Every single time, because:

- The gospel is always sufficient enough, and
- The redeemed love this, because
- The redeemed understand boundaries, because
- Boundaries lift Jesus up

Paul got it. He knew that the same gospel that had redeemed him was more than enough to redeem anyone else. He knew that if we're breathing, we're redeemable. He also knew that when we receive the forgiveness of Jesus, we don't get to decide who else can.

He knew that the good news was better than a good friend, a good job, or a good life, and so if the gospel forced him to choose, he knew that it wasn't really a choice at all.

Some hate the gospel because it includes and some hate it because it excludes. The redeemed love it because the gospel lifts up Jesus.

The Landing

The takeaway this morning is the Big Idea: The gospel is enough.

Sure, some will reject it and as a result they may reject us, but one of the most compelling themes of Acts 14 is how the 2 missionaries kept going back to the people and places where the gospel was rejected so that they could preach the good news again.

Why? Because **if the gospel is good news to me, then it must be good news from me.**

And this is key. If you and I haven't experienced the good news of the gospel, then this morning is nothing more than a slideshow full of pictures of places we wish we'd been.

In that place, we see it but don't really see it. We'll think about going all in, but it will be a thought because we'll still want others to like us and won't risk that for the gospel.

In short, the gospel won't be enough.

But when we've received the life changing, loving, good news of the gospel then we find ourselves saying what Paul said. Paul asked who is equal to such a task? Who can handle the boundaries, the rejections, the divisions that come with the gospel?

At the end of that same letter, in verses 9 and 10 of chapter 13, Paul wrote the following:

*But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. **For when I am weak, then I am strong.***

For Paul - and for us - the gospel had become sufficient enough, and that meant he could deal with anything that came his way as a result of it.

It will sometimes open the door to include people we wouldn't, and it will sometimes close the door to exclude people we wouldn't, but it will always enable us to love people we would not have normally loved.

And that redeeming, life-altering power is why the gospel will always be enough.