

The Wonders and Woes of Ministry

Text: Acts 14; I Peter 4:12-16

We are all called to ministry. 1 Corinthians 12:18: "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him." Ephesians 4:7, 8: "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." Everyone has a gift; some have more than one gift, but all of us are to serve the Lord with our gifts and with our gladness. Psalm 100:2: "Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing."

There are times when it is easy to serve the Lord with gladness; there are other times we have to be glad on purpose. Philippians 4:11: "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." Being glad and content at all times doesn't come naturally, but has to be learned. Keep in mind, it is a command. Philippians 4:4: "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice." I Thessalonians 5:18: "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

In this final half of Paul's first missionary journey there are highs and lows, adulation and persecution, fulfillment and frustration. Knowing the importance of our ministry, our mission and our Master will keep us keeping on!

I. THE MIXED RESPONSE

Acts 14:1-7

Paul and Barnabas arrived in Iconium and began to preach in the synagogue. I love the phrase, "...and so spake" (Acts 14:1b). I Peter 4:11 instructs all involved in ministry, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

The mission of Paul and Barnabas was a mission displaying the grace of God in salvation and evidence of their veracity was seen in signs and wonders. Yet the wonder of ministry was accompanied with the woes of resistance. Many Jews and Gentiles believed, but the unbelieving Jews turned many against the missionaries. Some were "...stirred up...and made their minds evil affected against the brethren" (Acts 14:2). Proverbs 12:18: "There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health." Speech can be lethal or life giving. James 3:6: "And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell." The poison of the unbelievers' speech provoked some of the group to attempt to stone Paul and Barnabas. After finding this out, they left Iconium for Lystra and Derbe, "And there they preached the gospel" (Acts 14:7).

II. THE POWER PRESENT

Acts 14: 8-10

In the crowd at Lystra, listening to Paul as he preached, was a crippled man who had never walked. While hearing the Word of God, the crippled man's faith was activated. Romans 10:17: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Paul perceived that

this man was ready to receive his miracle, so Paul, "Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked" (Acts 14:10). Even in the midst of critical people "sitting on the stool of do nothing and whittling on the stick of do less," there was power in the preaching and teaching of God's Word. This was illustrated in the ministry of Jesus. Luke 5:17: "And it came to pass on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judaea, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was present to heal them."

III. THE PROBLEM OF POPULARITY

Acts 14:11-13

When someone does something noteworthy, such as ministering to a crippled man, so that not only he walked again, but he was leaping, the temptation is to think more highly of oneself than he should. Romans 12:3: "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." Psalm 115:1: "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake."

Acts 3:1-16, Peter gives a clinic on the reason behind the healing of another crippled man. Paul was able later to give this great statement in Romans 11:36: "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to Whom be glory for ever. Amen."

IV. THE SINCERITY OF TRANSPARENCY

Acts 14:14-18

The people of Lystra were steeped in the idolatry of mythology. They perceived Barnabas to be Jupiter, who stoically stayed back while Paul was thought to be Mercury, the spokesman for the false deities. Immediately Paul and Barnabas tore their clothes to reveal their flesh as mere men. In total sincerity and transparency they were telling the citizens that they were susceptible to the same passions as any man. Romans 3:10: "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one." Paul and Barnabas went on to declare their mythology to be empty and void of anything beneficial. Then two missionaries lifted up the true and living God as Creator and provider. Hebrews 1:1, 2: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, Whom He hath appointed Heir of all things, by Whom also He made the worlds; God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, Whom He hath appointed Heir of all things, by Whom also He made the worlds." Psalm 104:19: "He appointed the moon for seasons: the sun knoweth his going down." Genesis 8:22: "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."

V. PERSECUTION THAT ACCOMPANIED AUTHENTIC MINISTRY

Acts 14:18-21

Even after Paul and Barnabas revealed their humanity, the people of Lystra still wanted to sacrifice to them as though they were deity. But an extreme paradigm took place when the unbelieving and angry fellow Jews came from Iconium, railing against the Gospel team and

doing so effectively that Paul was stoned and dragged out of the city, supposing he was dead. It is believed by some that Paul actually died and from this incident came the testimony of II Corinthians 12:1-5. How precious is this truth that was perhaps on that day revealed to Paul, i.e., no matter how many woes we experience, we who serve Jesus have the wonder of the Third Heaven awaiting us! I believe this was in Paul's mind when he said, "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" (Acts 14:22).

VI. THE FRUIT THAT REMAINED

Acts 14:22-27

A lasting work had been accomplished as Paul and Barnabas retraced their journey, ordaining others into ministry and allowing the Church, that Jesus promised to build, to flourish! John 15:16: "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, He may give it you." God opened the door of faith and even though there was persecution, the mission was accomplished. I Corinthians 16:9: "For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries."

CONCLUSION

Acts 14:28: "And there they abode long time with the disciples." A much needed respite was granted to the missionaries. Jesus set a precedent with His disciples in Mark 6:31: "And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat." Vance Havner said, "We had better learn to "come apart" and rest or we shall come apart. A great secret to lasting ministry is receiving rest after our labors. Heaven is the eternal rest from a life of service for our King! "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Revelation 14:13).

-Pastor Pope-