

Bi134 Acts

Lesson Bi134-26 Miracles in Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe

The famous German physicist, Albert Einstein, once stated that “nothing truly valuable arises from ambition, or from a mere sense of duty; it stems rather from love and devotion.” Today we look at another story from the Book of Acts. Paul and Barnabas’ love and devotion to God and his mission are revealed. We see their love, not so much from their words, but from their actions.

Leaving the newly planted church in Antioch Pisidia, the apostles took the route leading southwest until they arrived at Iconium. As they had done in Antioch, the next Sabbath they went into the Jewish synagogue. They preached the gospel with power and effectiveness. Some readily believed, but others fiercely opposed the apostles. Nevertheless, they remained in the city speaking boldly for the Lord. All the while, the Lord confirmed their words with miraculous signs and wonders.

Then those who opposed the message organized a gang of Jews and Gentiles who plotted to stone Paul and Barnabas. The apostles heard about the plot and fled to the city of Lystra. There they began preaching again.

One day a crowd gathered to listen to Paul and Barnabas. In the congregation was a man who had never walked, who had been crippled in his feet from birth. As Paul was preaching, his attention was drawn to the crippled man. Perceiving in the Spirit that the man had faith to be healed, Paul ordered him, “Stand up on your feet!” Everyone’s mouth fell open as the man jumped to his feet. He began to walk around, just as if he had walked all his life.

The people then began to cry out in their local language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!” They called Barnabas ‘Zeus,’ and Paul they called ‘Hermes,’ the names of two of their gods. The pagan priest rounded up some bulls and put wreaths around their necks. Then they began preparations to sacrifice them to the apostles.

When the two apostles saw what was going on, they were horrified. They began tearing their clothes and pleading with the people. “What do you think you are doing?” they asked. “We are only humans like all of you. Besides, the very reason we came here was to tell you to turn from these wretched practices to serve the God who is really alive. He is the one who made heaven and earth and everything else.” The apostles continued, “In the past God may have tolerated such actions, but no more. You can see God’s kindness in the way he makes your crops grow in their season. Only he can meet your needs and fills your hearts with joy.” After many such words, the people finally abandoned their plan (Acts 14:1-18).

About that time, some rabble rousers arrived from Antioch and Iconium and began poisoning the minds of the people. They whipped up an angry mob that dragged Paul outside the city. They stoned him and left him for dead. However, some of the new disciples from the city gathered around him and prayed. Miraculously, God raised him up! He turned around and went back into the city.

The following day Paul and Barnabas left Lystra and traveled to the nearby city of Derbe. There they once again preached the good news about Christ and many people turned to God. Then, doubling back, they retraced their steps through Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. In each city they took time to strengthen the new disciples. They encouraged them to keep living for Jesus, and told them, “We must pass through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.” After appointing elders in each of the new churches, they prayed and fasted with them. As they departed, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had put their trust.

On their way home Paul and Barnabas stopped off in Perga. There they preached the word of the Lord. Then, sailing from Perga they returned to Antioch Syria, the place where they had begun the missionary journey. In Antioch the saints gathered to hear from them all that God had done. They rejoiced at how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. The two apostles remained in Antioch a long time getting some much needed rest and fellowship with the disciples there (Acts 14:19-28).

From the amazing story of Paul and Barnabas’ ministry in Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe we can learn many important lessons about missionary and evangelistic work. Let’s look at three of those lessons.

First, we learn how important it is that we faithfully proclaim the message of Christ to the lost. This, after all, is the primary task of the church. In Iconium Paul and Barnabas “spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.” In Derbe “they preached the good news...and won a large number of disciples.” And in Lystra, when the people wanted to offer sacrifices to them, Paul declared, “We are bringing you good news telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God.”

We too must focus on proclaiming the gospel to the lost. And we must learn to do it effectively, as Paul and Barnabas did in Iconium. Effectiveness in preaching comes from the preacher’s thorough knowledge of Scripture, his personal character, and the anointing of the Holy Spirit on his or her ministry.

Second, this ministry of Paul and Barnabas teaches the importance of spiritual gifts in spreading the message of Christ. In Iconium God “confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.” In Lystra the manifestation of spiritual gifts opened the way for effective evangelism. By observing closely what happened in Lystra, we can see how God used a series of spiritual gifts. The gifts worked together to bring about the desired result of bringing people to faith Christ. Paul preached a Spirit-anointed message (a prophetic gift). He was enabled by the Spirit to look into a man’s heart and see that he had faith to be healed (a revelation gift). He then acted in the gift of faith and commanded the crippled man to stand on his feet. The man obeyed, and a miracle occurred (a power gift).

To be truly effective missionaries and ministers of the gospel, we too must learn to hear God’s voice. As we respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, he uses us to minister spiritual gifts. We must never forget that missionary ministry is more than simply talking. It involves hearing and obeying the voice of the Spirit. It also involves preaching and teaching the gospel

under an anointing of the Spirit. It includes acting in faith and allowing the Spirit to minister through us through prophetic words, and miracles of healing and deliverance. If this is to happen in our lives, we, like Paul and Barnabas, must learn to minister in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Third, from the apostles' ministry in Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, we learn the importance of devotion to the Lord and to his mission. It was such devotion that prompted Paul and Barnabas to go to this task. It was that same devotion that kept them there. In Iconium the Jews and Gentiles plotted to stone them yet, the Bible says, "They spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord." When they were eventually forced to leave the city, they went to "Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, where they continued to preach the good news." Paul was stoned in Lystra, dragged out of the city, and left to die. Yet, he went back into the city and continued to preach the gospel.

We cannot let opposition keep us from preaching Christ to all who will listen. When we go out to preach the gospel, we cannot expect everyone to receive our message. Some, however, will. Whatever the case, we must continue to preach the good news as long as God wants us to remain in an area. Such boldness comes only as we remain full of the Holy Spirit and fully devoted to Christ and his work.

This lesson is **important** because from it we can learn some valuable lessons about how we can effectively carry out the work of evangelism and missions.

The **main truth** we learn from this lesson is that we must devote ourselves to God and his mission. Further, if we are going to be effective witnesses for Christ we must learn how to effectively proclaim the gospel of Christ to the lost. And, we must allow the Spirit to flow through us in the manifestation of spiritual gifts.

Let's now **review** some important truths we have learned from this lesson.

1. After leaving Antioch Pisidia, in what three Galatian cities did Paul and Barnabas minister?
A. [PAUSE] If you answered, "They ministered in Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe," you answered correctly.
2. What was the main focus of the apostles' ministry in each of these cities?
A. [PAUSE] If you answered that the main focus of their ministries was the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, you are right.
3. What lesson have we learned concerning the importance of spiritual gifts in missionary work?
A. [PAUSE] If you answered, "To be truly effective missionaries and ministers of the gospel, we must know how to respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and to be used by him to minister spiritual gifts," you answered correctly.
4. What spiritual quality will cause us to remain faithful to the mission of proclaiming the gospel to the lost even in the face of strong opposition?

A [PAUSE] If you answered that devotion to Christ and his mission will cause us to remain faithful to the mission of proclaiming the gospel, you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** is to listen to this lesson several more times until you can tell the story of Paul and Barnabas' ministry in Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe to others. Then, tell the story and teach the lessons we can learn from the story to someone else. Ask the Lord to manifest his power in you through the use of spiritual gifts in your ministry.