



Iconium: A Typical Town

Acts 14:1-7

1. Reception (verse 1)
2. Opposition (verse 2)
3. Instruction (verse 3)
4. Division (verse 4)
5. Persecution (verses 5-6)
6. Proclamation (verse 7)

I have a few friends who are pilots. I don't see them often. But when I do, I like to ask them where they went this past week. Normally, the answer takes a few moments. because they travel all over the world. and visit the same cities so often that each week blurs into the next. and they frequently can't tell me where they were in the past week. Traveling the globe is all so normal.

I have some friends who are in the medical field. From time to time, I like to ask them what is the most interesting disease that they encountered this week. Again, there is often the same reaction. because, they treat so many patients, very few of them really stand out so much.

I have some friends who are in law enforcement. I often like to ask them what was the most interesting crime that you dealt with this week. Again, the same reaction. because, they deal with so many people, who are in trouble with the law, that very few of their interactions actually stand out so much.

Well, today as we spend our time in the book of Acts, we will see Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. We will read of them in the town of Iconium. The story is found in Acts 14, verses 1 through 7.

What is interesting about Iconium is that it's not really so interesting.

In our text, nobody is named. We read about "a great number of people" We read about the "Jew" and the "Gentiles" But we never hear any one of them named. In fact, Paul and Barnabas aren't mentioned by name. They are simply identified as "they."

Furthermore, in our text, we don't read about anything that anybody said. there are no quotes. We have no exact words. We know that the gospel was preached, we simply don't know the contents of what was said, unlike in Antioch (in Acts 13), when we have great detail of the content of what Paul said. On top of that, nothing out of the ordinary happens in these verses.

Now, it's not that nothing happens in this city. There is much that takes place in this city. But nothing really stands out. People come to faith in Iconium, "a great number" of people come to faith. We just don't know any of their names. There is resistance to Paul and Barnabas and the gospel message, so much so that Paul and Barnabas feel like they need to leave the city for their own safety! We just don't know the details of the threats that came against them. There is lots of instruction that takes place. Paul and Barnabas remain in Iconium "a long time" (verse 3). We just don't know what they taught the people in Iconium.

It's like the routine of your day. You get up. You eat your breakfast. You go off to your activities of the day. Nothing special. You come home in the evening. You eat some dinner with your family. And you go to bed. It's difficult to remember what you had for dinner last night. It's difficult to remember what you did on Tuesday evening. It's not that nothing happens throughout your days and weeks, Depending upon your day, you build things. you go places. you help people. you learn things. But nothing particular stands out. It's just that everything is so normal. It's so typical.

That's what we see happen in the city of Iconium. We see great things happening, evangelism takes place. discipleship takes place. persecution takes place. We just don't know the details.

Next week, when we go to Lystra! We will see great adventure! A paralytic healed! The miracle was so great that crowds wanted to worship Barnabas and Paul, believing them to be gods! Even the priest of Zeus is wanting to offer up sacrifices to them! And then Paul will preach the gospel to them. But those in Lystra will remain unconvinced of the gospel. But our text this morning is unlike this. It's not filled with great details of intriguing stories!

This, I believe, this is the key that unlocks Iconium for us. It's the typical, generic city that Paul and Barnabas visit on their first missionary journey. The title of my message this morning is "Iconium: A Typical Town," because, that's what it was. It was typical. That is, everything that happened in Iconium happened in many other cities in the book of Acts, happened in other cities. We just don't have the details. It's simply a story of a typical missionary town.

There is great application here for us this morning. Because we go throughout lives living out typical days. And we may think that nothing is happening. That God isn't working in our lives. Oh, but church family. God is working! He is working in the mundane. We often want to see

God working in the great ways, but miss the ways that he is working through the ordinary.

One of my most favorite biographies that I have read is the biography of Tom Carson. Have any of you heard of him? Do you know where he lived or what he did? He was a pastor. Do any of you know of him? He ministered in Canada. Does that ring a bell?

Tom Carson is the father of D. A. Carson. D. A. Carson, "Emeritus Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and co-founder of the Gospel Coalition. He is a prominent evangelical scholar and author."^[1] He has written dozens and dozens of books. One man described him as "one of the last great Renaissance men in evangelical biblical scholarship."^[2] I love listening to him preach, because he combines deep scholarship, with approachable devotion and clarity.

But D. A. Carson's dad wasn't anything like this. He was, "An ordinary pastor." D. A. Carson wrote his biography. that's the only way that we know him. His biography is entitled, "Memoirs of an Ordinary Pastor."

Some pastors, mightily endowed by God, are remarkable gifts to the church. They love their people, they handle Scripture well, they see many conversions, their ministries span generations, they understand their culture yet refuse to be domesticated by it, they are theologically robust and personally disciplined. I do not need to provide you with a list of names: you know some of these people, and you have been encouraged and challenged by them, as I have. Some of them, of course, carry enormous burdens that watching Christians do not readily see. Nevertheless, when we ourselves are not being tempted by the green-eyed monster, we thank God for such Christian leaders from the past and pray for the current ones.

Most of us, however, serve in more modest patches. Most pastors will not regularly preach to thousands, let alone tens of thousands. They will not write influential books, they will not supervise large staffs, and they will never see more than modest growth. They will plug away at their care for the aged, at their visitation, at their counseling, at their Bible studies and preaching. Some will work with so little support that they will prepare their own bulletins. They cannot possibly discern whether the constraints of their own sphere of service owe more to the specific challenges of the local situation or to their own shortcomings. Once in a while they will cast a wistful eye on "successful" ministries. Many of them will attend the conferences sponsored by the revered masters and come away with a slightly discordant combination of, on the one hand, gratitude and encouragement and, on the other, jealousy, feelings of inadequacy, and guilt.

Most of us—let us be frank—are ordinary pastors.

Dad was one of them. This little book is a modest attempt to let the voice and ministry of one ordinary pastor be heard, for such servants have much to teach us.^[3]

Tom Carson labored as a pastor in Canada. His churches were never big. The only convert of his ministry that any of us have ever heard of is his son. But he labored faithfully as a pastor for many, many years, through difficult times. He evangelized the lost. he encouraged the believing. He ministered to the hurting. He led Bible studies and preached sermons. He conducting baptisms and weddings and funerals. God worked in his life. We just don't know many of the details of his working. In many ways, this is the purpose of the book that D. A. Carson wrote about his dad: that we might know the details of his life.

That's what we see this morning in the labors of Paul and Barnabas in Iconium. It was a typical missionary town that they visited. We know of the general things that happened, but not the specific. Certainly, a book could have been written about God's working in this town. However, by the providence of God, we have enough to rejoice at God's working in this typical town.

Acts 14:1-7

Now at Iconium they [that is, Paul and Barnabas] entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, and there they continued to preach the gospel.

Now, before we actually look at the details of what happened in Iconium, let's review a bit about how Paul and Barnabas arrived there. If you have been following along in recent weeks, you probably remember how they arrived here. Their voyage began in Antioch of Syria. Antioch is in the Middle East. It's near the eastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea, 300 miles north of Jerusalem.

It was here in Antioch that Paul and Barnabas and a few other leaders were there "worshiping the Lord and fasting" (Acts 13:1). seeking the Lord's will in their lives. The Holy Spirit met them there and said, "Set apart from me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:2). And so, Barnabas and Saul (who is called Paul) set out on the work. They set out on the work of missions to the world.

They began with a walk about 15 miles to the coastal city of Seleucia. From there, they embarked on a ship to make the day-long trip across the sea to the Island of Cyprus. They landed at Salamis, a coastal city on the island. From there, they walked across the Island from east to west, a journey of about 80 miles. Along the route, they were preaching in the synagogues (Acts 13:4).

Finally, they arrived in Paphos, along the western shore of the island. In Paphos, they were confronted by Bar-Jesus, a Jewish sorcerer. Paul rebuked him and cursed him with blindness (Acts 13:11). But another man of Paphos, Sergius Paulus, the proconsul, believed in the Lord, [being] astonished at the teaching of the Lord" (Acts 13:12).

From Paphos, Paul and Barnabas set sail once again. They boarded a ship north, and landed in Perga of Pamphilia. (Of note, their traveling

companion, John Mark withdrew from them, and returned back to Jerusalem. We will talk about this more at the end of Acts, chapter 15). Now, from best we can tell, Paul and Barnabas spent very little time in Perga. Instead, they continued on north, by land into the mountains, traveling about 100 miles, and up some 3600 feet, until they arrived in Antioch of Pisidia.

In Antioch, Paul and Barnabas attended a service in the synagogue. They were invited to speak a “word of encouragement for the people” (Acts 13:15). And so Paul stood up and spoke the greatest word of encouragement that could ever be given. He spoke the gospel. That God was faithful to Israel, in bringing Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised (Acts 13:23) in the Old Testament. Jesus was the one who lived in Jerusalem, but was hated by those who lived there, and they asked Pilate to have him executed (Acts 13:28). Jesus was crucified upon a cross. He was buried in a tomb (Acts 13:29). But God raised him from the dead (Acts 13:30). Through faith in Jesus “forgiveness of sins” may be found (Acts 13:32).

This gospel that Paul proclaimed is the same gospel that we proclaim! God is a faithful God. We have gone astray, just like Israel. We all are sinners in need of God’s forgiveness! But God has given to us a Savior, Jesus. We simply need to believe in him. In so doing, we can know and experience forgiveness of sins. We don’t earn forgiveness by the things we do, or the religious rituals we perform, or by our own righteousness. We don’t earn righteousness by praying three times a day, or by praying an hour each day. We don’t earn righteousness by giving 10 percent of our income to the church, or by supporting three missionaries. We don’t earn righteousness, by attending church services, or by reading Christian books. Our righteousness comes by faith in Jesus Christ!

Do you believe this? Do you believe the gospel? Do you believe this good news?

Well, after Paul preached his sermon from the pew, many were excited to hear him the next Sabbath. But when the next Sabbath rolled around, and nearly the entire town shows up, (Acts 13:44), including many Gentiles, the Jews were filled with jealousy and were contradicting everything that Paul was saying (Acts 13:45). Though there were some in Antioch who believed, eventually, Paul was driven out of the city and out of the district (Acts 13:51). So, Paul and Barnabas hit the road. and they traveled eastward from Antioch to Iconium. The journey took several days, and about 90 miles.

The first thing that we see in Iconium is how well the gospel message was received. For the sake of providing some structure to my message this morning, I’m calling this, ...

1. Reception (verse 1)

Acts 14:1

Now at Iconium they [that is, Paul and Barnabas] entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed.

This is very typical of what took place in the book of Acts. Paul and Barnabas enter into the Jewish *synagogue*, where the Jews were gathered. and they preached the gospel. We saw this in on the Island of Cyprus. When Paul and Barnabas traveled across the island, they preached the gospel to the Jews in the synagogues (Acts 13:4). When they arrived in Paphos, they again, preached to the Jews (Acts 13:6). When they arrived in Antioch, again, the same thing, they went into the synagogue (Acts 13:14). and they preached to the Jews.

This is “typical.” This pattern will continue on throughout the book of Acts. Paul will go to the synagogues in Thessalonica and Berea and Corinth. And when there is no synagogue (like in Philippi), they will gather where the Jews gather for prayer. This is because the gospel is “for the Jew first.”

But the gospel in Iconium wasn’t merely for the Jews. Some of the Greeks believed as well. It is because the gospel comes after the Jew to the Greek. This took place in Antioch. Just after the Jews were reviling Paul and rejecting everything that he was saying, we read this:

Acts 13:46-48

And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.” And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

Something like this must have taken place in Iconium, for we read, “a *great number* of both Jews and Greeks believed.” This is typical of the book of Acts as well. That’s why it has been so encouraging for us to work through! The time of Acts is a time of great revival! We read of many coming to faith.

On the day of Pentecost, some 3,000 people believed. A few weeks later, the numbers in the church was up to 5,000! And here in Acts, we are only beginning with the spread of the gospel to the world. it’s the first missionary journey. there are several more to come! Continuing on in Acts, we will see the gospel taking root in the lives of many, many people! In fact, when Paul arrives in Thessalonica, the Jews were jealous of the impact that the gospel was making all around the world. They said, “These men have turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6).

Now, in our day, we may be seeing quite the reception of the gospel. Our country is hard toward the truth. If God would so soften our hearts, we too would experience such a reception among our own people. But what may not experience, the early church did. Typically, when Paul went out to spread the gospel, there was great “Reception.” But, there was also great ...

2. Opposition (verse 2)

Acts 14:2

But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.

Not everyone in Iconium received the gospel. There were those who were hostile to it, particularly among the Jewish people. So, they “stirred up the Gentiles.”

Again, we have no details as to how they did this. In Jerusalem, the Jews arrested the apostles and brought them before the religious authorities. In Antioch, the Jews contradicted Paul and reviled him to his face right there in the synagogue (Acts 13:45). In Thessalonica, the Jews will drag Jason before the authorities, to hold him accountable for the message Paul was preaching, of another king, Jesus (Acts 17:6-7). In Corinth, the Jews will bring Paul before Gallio, the proconsul, seeking his authority to cast Paul out of the city. This is typical for the book of Acts. People are often opposed to the gospel. This is what we see in Iconium.

The only detail that we receive of how this was done is the phrase, “poisoned their minds” (Acts 14:2). The unbelieving Jews poisoned their minds against the brothers. Somehow, and in some way, the Jews went to the Gentiles and spoke with them against Paul and Barnabas, in such a way that they felt threatened by the gospel message.

They may have said things like ... “This message isn’t true!” “This message is of the devil!” “This message is to be avoided at all costs!” “If the people of our town believe this message, things will never be the same. “The Jews will revolt! There will be chaos in the streets.” “You cannot let this happen.”

This is so applicable for us today. Today, Christians all across our land are seeking to persuade others to believe the gospel. And those on the secular side see Christianity as a threat, and are trying to poison our minds of those who are considering believing the gospel.

A few years ago, Yvonne and the kids visited the Ark Encounter in Williamstown, Kentucky. Yvonne made a nice, vlog-style video, showing their visit to the ark, showing how large it was, and how every kind of animal was certainly able to fit on the ark. She posted the video on YouTube. And no sooner had she posted it, then someone commented something to this effect, “What a terrible thing! That our little children are being indoctrinated with such lies!”^[4] The world thinks that we are poisoning the minds of our youth as we teach them the truths of God. Yet, we believe the other way. We believe that Bill Nye, the science guy, is always trying to poison the minds of our youth.

A good illustration of this came a few years ago in 2017, when Amy Coney Barrett was in her confirmation hearings for the court of appeals. Barrett is a committed Roman Catholic of upstanding character. At the time of the hearing, Diane Feinstein, Senator from California made the observation, “The dogma lives loudly within you.” From Feinstein’s perspective, it was not a good comment. It was an attempt to show how religion is a poison that must be avoided!

Something similar was taking place in Iconium. One might think that this would cause Paul and Barnabas to go to another place. However, it stirred them to stay! Verse 3 begins, “So they remained for a long time.” Don’t miss the significance of the little word, “So.” The New American Standard Version translates this, “Therefore.” That is, because of the opposition, because the Jews were trying to poison the minds of the Gentiles, Paul and Barnabas felt the need to stay! They had to show the reality, that in actuality, it was the Jews who were the poison! So, they remained “for a long time.”

We don’t know exactly how “long” this time was. I would suspect that it was for several months, at least. During this time, they were instructing the disciples in the truth. This is my third point.

3. Instruction (verse 3)

Acts 14:3

So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

We know nothing of the content of their instruction. All we know is the manner of their instruction.

They spoke “boldly.” That is, they stood up to those who were resisting the gospel! They were correcting the errors of their ways. When the Jews would try to contradict Paul and show him to be false, they would stand firm.

Listen, church family, we need to stand in this way as well. When you see from the Scriptures, and you know in your heart something to be true, you must be bold.

Yvonne and I were recently at a children’s play. And there was a good friend of ours who was speaking with us about some controversy that has come up in another Christian Theater Group in town. Their headquarters (in Chicago), recently made a stand for Christian Morality. They mandated that the employees of their organization, particularly those who would be interacting with the children in the theater productions, would hold to an orthodox Christian morality. In other words, that their employees not be practicing homosexuals.

But our good friend (who teaches at a Christian school in town), was saying how terrible it was that they were making such a stand. He was criticizing the ancient morality that was being demanded. This is today! How can you hold people to that today? He was lamenting that our children struggling with sexual identity issues will have no one to turn to, who would sympathize with their feelings!

It was too much for me. I was stirred within. I said, “I want you to know that I am 100% behind their actions. They made the right choice. They are making the right stand. As an overtly Christian organization, it only makes sense for their leaders to hold to an orthodox Christian morality for those in positions of authority over the children in the organization.” It was difficult. But it needed to be said with boldness. That’s what Paul was doing in Antioch. He was instructing with boldness.

Regarding the content of their instruction, we certainly can assume with confidence that the Old Testament Scripture was the main content of

their teaching and instruction. They were going to the Scriptures and opening them up for the people in Antioch! Further, they certainly also spoke about the eyewitness accounts of the apostles who saw Jesus alive. Paul may also have told his testimony of his Damascus road experience.

But they weren't the only ones working. God was working as well. We see the Lord, "[bearing] witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands." One reason why God does signs and wonders is to bear witness to his message. Another reason for God doing something miraculous is his grace, for sure. But here, we see that the signs and wonders that God did was by way of "bearing witness" to the unbelieving! This is what Hebrews 2:3b-4 says about those who heard the gospel. We read, "[The gospel] was declared at first by the Lord [Jesus], and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will."

This is typical for the book of Acts. It is a book filled with signs and wonders. So far, we have seen many signs and wonders. On the day of Pentecost, God poured out several signs and wonders: Sound of rushing wind (2:2). Tongues of fire (2:3). Miraculous speech (2:4). Soon afterwards, Peter healed a lame man in Acts 3:1-10. This sign demonstrated the power of Jesus. It was "in the name of Jesus" that Peter performed this miracle (Acts 3:6). Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead through the word of the apostles (Acts 5:1-11). This was to show the authority of their word! On several occasions, an angel came and opened up a prison cell (Acts 5:17-21; 12:6-11). This gave verification of God's support for the apostles. A light and a voice appeared to Saul at his conversion (Acts 9:1-9). He was blinded and healed through the prayer of Aeneas (Acts 9:8-19). His prayer testified to truthfulness of his experience.

Further, we saw how Aeneas was healed of paralysis (9:32-35). We saw how Dorcas was restored to life (9:36-41). Herod died of worms when he exalted himself above the Lord (12:20-23). Bar-Jesus was blinded at the command of Paul (Acts 13:6-11). We will see many more in weeks and months to come. Next week a cripple at Lystra healed (14:8-10). In Philippi demons will cast out of a slave girl (16:16-18). Eutychus will be raised from death (20:7-12). Paul will survive a snake bite (28:3-5).^[5]

We can only imagine the signs and wonders done here in Iconium at the hands of Paul and Barnabas. Perhaps there was a cripple who was healed. Perhaps there were sick people who were healed. Perhaps there were lepers who were healed. But for some reason, we are not told. We are simply told that they served to bear witness to the word of God's grace that Paul and Barnabas were proclaiming as they sought to boldly teach the people.

The results of the opposition are clearly communicated in verse 4. I'm calling it ...

4. Division (verse 4)

Acts 14:4

But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles.

We know a bit about division in nation. We are a nation divided. But what divides our nation today? It's mostly political issues. It's issues of race. It's issue of COVID. Most in our country is on one side or another of these issues.

But what divided those in Iconium was the gospel of God's grace. You had half of the city on the side of God's grace and faith in Jesus. And on the other side you had those who were opposed to all of those things, whether that's Jews wanting to keep the law or Gentiles who simply want political peace. The gospel came into Iconium and divided that city. Some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. You had "Team Jews" and "Team Apostles."

This didn't catch Paul and Barnabas by surprise. It didn't keep Jesus by surprise. Jesus predicted it. He said, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth, I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). Jesus said, "I'm going to divide!" I'm going to divide families. He said, "For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household" (Matthew 10:35-36). Some of you have experienced such a family split over the gospel.

Division is very difficult. But it's the reality when the gospel comes into a place. You will either believe the message or you will reject it. You will either believe that Jesus died for your sins on the cross and come to experience the joy of sins forgiven. Or, you will reject it and try to make it on your own by the law.

In fact, this is how the entire world is made up. There are two classes of people in the world, "the saints" and "the aints." Those who believe and those who don't. Jesus said, "Enter by the narrow gate" (Matthew 7:13). There is one gate of the apostles, the narrow gate of Jesus. Everything else is the wide gate. Jesus said that there are two foundations. You either build on the foundation of rock, which is Jesus, or you build on the foundation of sand, which is your own thoughts. Jesus was constantly talking about the two kinds of people. There were wheat and there were tares. There were the sheep and the goats. There is a division. The gospel makes that division.

In my preparation for my sermon, I listened to a sermon by Brian Borgman entitled, "The Gospel Sword." He couched his entire message around this divisional nature of the gospel. It split the town in two, between the believers and the unbelievers. "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). God's word can cut deep into our heart. God's word divided the city of Iconium into two parts.

As a result of the division, we see ...

5. Persecution (verses 5-6)

Acts 14:5-6

When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, they learned

of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country,

Here we see the unbelievers with the political powers on their side making an attempt "to mistreat them and to stone them" (verse 5). We don't know what that attempt was like. In our day and age, it might be an intimidating phone call. Or it might be a drive by your house. Or it might be shots fired. We don't know what it was, but it was "an attempt" (verse 5).

At this point, Paul and Barnabas felt like they needed to leave. The opposition experienced in verse 2 was not enough to make them leave. Verse 2 was simply verbal opposition. But when there was an attempt upon their lives, they felt it best to get out of dodge.

This persecution is typical in all the book of Acts. We saw persecution in Acts 4 and Acts 5, when the religious authorities commanded the apostles to stop preaching in the name of Jesus. Peter said, "We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). And so, they were flogged and released. The persecution was so bad in Acts 7 that Stephen was killed. Saul was "ravaging the church" (Acts 8:3) before he was converted on the road to Damascus. He was "entering house after house" and "dragged off men and women and committed them to prison" (Acts 8:3). In Acts 12:2 we see James beheaded for the gospel. Peter was in prison, to be executed the next day, were it not for the angel who came and rescued him from prison.

Here in our passage, we see attempts made at stoning Paul and Barnabas. We will see this actually take place in verse 19, when the Jews from Antioch and Iconium come to Lystra and stoned Paul and left him for dead. There were actual rocks thrown at Paul, actually striking him down, until he was out cold and left for dead.

Persecution for the gospel was normative throughout the book of Acts. We will see Paul and Silas thrown into prison in Philippi. In Thessalonica, Paul will have to slip out of the city to avoid persecution. In Berea, people from Thessalonica came and drove him out of town. When Paul arrived in Corinth, the threats on his life were such that he was ready to leave the city. It took a direct revelation from God that assured him of his safety to keep him in Corinth (Acts 18:9-10). In Acts 21, we will see Paul arrested in the temple. And the rest of the book of Acts will center around the persecution that Paul endured as a prisoner. The Jews wanted him dead. It was only the secular government that protected him.

Persecution is normal in the book of Acts. That's why Iconium is a typical town. When in this town, Paul and Barnabas were facing some great persecution. This is especially made clear later in Acts 14, when he returns to Iconium on his way back to Jerusalem. He visits the churches, saying "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

The Christian walk is a walk that should expect persecution. The fact that we are not experiencing great persecution here in the United States, is atypical of the lives of Christians. [1] Paul said, "All who desires to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12). Do you want to live godly in Christ Jesus? Expect persecution to come. The Christian life isn't a call to ease. No. It's through many tribulations that you must enter the kingdom of God. It's hard. But Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Finally, we see ...

6. Proclamation (verse 7)

Acts 14:7
and there they continued to preach the gospel.

Again, we have no details of exactly what they spoke. All we know is of their pattern. Whenever they went into a city, they would seek out a synagogue, where they could bring the gospel to Jewish people. When the Jews rejected the gospel, they would turn to the Gentiles. We know that the apostolic pattern of preaching the gospel is found in Acts 13, where Paul's sermon is recorded in detail.

In Acts 13, Paul told those in the synagogue that the God of Israel chose Abraham and brought from him a great number of people in accordance with God's promise to him (see Genesis 12:1-3). Even though the people had rebelled against the Lord and resisted him, God remained faithful to his promise to bless the people of Israel. From the line of David would come a king, who would be the Messiah to rescue Israel (see 2 Samuel 7). And this king has come. His name is Jesus. Yet, those who live in Jerusalem didn't recognize him. They should have recognized him because the Scriptures are read every Sabbath in the synagogue. Instead, they fulfilled those very Scriptures by having him executed by Pontius Pilate on a cross. But God raised him from the dead. And now, he is the one through whom we can experience forgiveness of sins!

This is surely something like what he said as he continued on his way preaching the gospel. Paul is a traveling evangelist who has his 3 or 4 sermons that he preaches over and over again, unlike a pastor, who needs to give a new sermon to his congregation weekly. This is probably the same message that Paul preached over and over again.

I'm sure that there were some who believed this message and others who didn't. In Lystra we will see a fruitless ministry. Paul will preach the gospel there, but there won't be any who believe. And some of us know about fruitless ministry. We tell others of Jesus, and few respond in faith. Yet the gospel was proclaimed.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on November 7, 2021 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/D._A._Carson.

[2] Ibid.

[3] D. A. Carson, *Memoirs of an Ordinary Pastor: The Life and Reflections of Tom Carson* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 9.

[4] I don't have the exact wording of the comment, as my wife rightly deleted the comment from her video.

[5] I was helped by a list of miracles in Acts given here: <https://ourdailybread.org/resources/the-miracles-of-god-in-acts/>.

[6] Brian Borgman, *The Gospel Sword*, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=1227071752380>.

[7] Some may argue with this statement that we aren't being persecuted in America. Nobody has been stoned in America for their faith. I don't know anybody who has been shot and killed in America solely because of his/her faith. Even if one could come up with several examples of this, it is still far from the norm.