

April 1/2, 2006

The Unstoppable Church
Unstoppable Missionaries
Acts 14:1-28
Pastor Bryan Clark

We have been working our way through the Book of Acts. We started in September and now we reach at least the conclusion of the first half. Next week we go on to some other things and we will pick it up again in September.

Acts 1:8 is really the driving theme of Acts. Jesus says, “Empowered by the Spirit of God, you shall be My witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and around the world.” Many things in the Book of Acts are not necessarily meant to be the norm for the church today. It was a time of transition, and a lot of dynamic things were happening. But that passion of the Church for the mission of Jesus Christ clearly is the scene that is communicated through the Book of Acts.

We have said many times that when we trusted Christ as Savior we did not get on a cruise ship, we got on a battleship. And we have talked about all the implications of that. If it is a battle, then there is an enemy and there is going to be opposition. We have talked about the many ways that the enemy tried to keep the unstoppable Church from succeeding. That might be imprisonment, that might be fear, that might be threats—we have talked about a number of those things.

There is one thing we have not talked about, and I want to talk about it now. Sometimes the enemy can be so clever that he renders us ineffective simply by distracting us. He does not have to lure us into all kinds of sordid, sinful behaviors. He may distract us into many things that we would say are very good but they are not the main thing. I would say that he considers that to be a victory. It is easy to get distracted.

I have to admit this morning we were messing with you a little bit. In the opening song, we filled it with all kinds of distractions. We had somebody coming in late. We had sound problems. We had light issues. We had slide problems. You are probably sitting there thinking, *What is wrong with these people? Did they not get up in time this morning?* For some reason the tech people were really adamant: “Make sure you say we were doing this on purpose.” I could have had some fun with this, but they control the sound every week so I am not that stupid. Wouldn’t you admit that when all of that was going on, it was very hard to stay focused on the point? You were distracted by all this other stuff. The reality is that the enemy does not have to keep us home to keep us from worshiping. All he has to do is distract our minds.

The same thing is true when it comes to carrying out the mission of the church, week in and week out in the trenches. The enemy does not have to lure us into all kinds of ugly, sinful things, but just get us distracted. In the process of doing good things, we lose sight of the main thing.

Paul and Barnabas are encountering many distractions but they are the picture of the unstoppable missionaries. Turn to Acts 14. We get a great picture of how they responded to the many distractions that came their way.

Whenever you study the Scripture, one of the challenges is to figure out what we call the unit of thought. What is the unit under study? If you do not get enough, sometimes you cannot get the point. What is the author’s point? If you get too much, it is overwhelming. Some might think that chapters 13 and 14 are one unit, and they are. It is just too much material to cover in one service. Chapters 13 and 14 are really one unit, one story and one main point.

Last week we talked about what is referred to as the first missionary journey of Paul. They left from Antioch and they went to various locations. At every location consistently there was a declaration of the Gospel message. There was immediately opposition but there were also those who placed their faith in Jesus. Paul identifies the opposition as being the devil himself. This is a cosmic war and there is an understanding that this is a battle. If we are going to be proclaimers of the Gospel, we need to expect opposition. It is not easy. We need to get in that frame of mind.

They get chased out of the city of Antioch and they flee to Iconium. That is where we pick up the story in chapter 14:1.

In Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and of Greeks. But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren. (Acts 14:1-2, *NASB)

Let's just go that far. They go about 100 miles to Iconium. You can follow the journey on the map. It is still a pretty thriving, modern city. One of the things Paul made clear is that the focus was going to go to the Gentiles. You might ask the question: Why were they in the synagogue? The answer is because any city that had a synagogue would have been the most strategic place to go, no matter who you are reaching, because that was really the best platform to proclaim your message. It is evident, even in this text, that there were both Jews and Greeks there. They hear the message and many of them respond.

Just like we have seen before, immediately there is opposition. As a matter of fact, verse 2 says, **“But the Jews who disbelieved...”** That Greek word translated “disbelief” is actually the Greek word for disobeyed. What the text is basically saying is when you believe the Gospel you are obeying God. When you disbelieve you are disobeying God. That is the heartbeat of the text right there. What did they do? They went to the Gentiles and they **“embittered them against the brethren.”** The word “embittered” is a word that could be translated “they poisoned their minds.” We might use the word slander. They immediately sought to discredit the messengers.

We have seen this several times in the Book of Acts. One of the things that we have to come to grips with, and it is not a very pleasant thought, is that if you are going to be serious about accomplishing the mission of the church, if you are going to be a proclaimer of the message of the Gospel, you have to face the fact that there will be things said about you that simply are not true. We would call that slander. Paul identified the enemy last week as the devil. The word “devil” actually means slander. That is who he is; that is how he plays. That is the way the battle is fought. You just have to accept that. If you have been diligent about trying to share Jesus in the marketplace, you have found people saying things about you that just simply are not true. And it is hurtful. It is painful. None of us like that. If you share the Gospel in your neighborhood, then all of a sudden people are saying things about you that just simply are not true.

I had lunch this week with a pastor friend of mine. We have been friends for years and he knows me well. One of the things he said in our lunch was, “Bryan, sometimes I can't believe the things people say about you out in the community.” I said to him, “You know, there is nothing I can do about that. That is the way the enemy plays the game, and I settled that years ago. I need to do my part to be a person of integrity and leave my reputation with God.” I suppose I could spend lots of time trying to track down who is saying what and ask them, “Why are you saying this?” But that plays exactly into the enemy's hands. Then I am not doing the work of the

ministry. I am distracted and that is a victory for him. That is not just true of me; that is true of you. If you are diligent about the message of the Gospel, people will say things about you that just are not true. You have to accept that, and God will take care of your reputation.

When it gets that way, the best thing to do is leave town and so that is what the text says, “Therefore, he fled town.” Oh no, that is not what it says.

Therefore, they spent a long time there... (v. 3a)

This is a case of, “So there—you don’t like us; we are staying.” (I almost said something there but the Spirit overruled. Do not ask me after the service; I am not going to say it.)

Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands. But the people of the city were divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles. And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them, they became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region; and there they continued to preach the gospel. (vs. 3-7)

The word “therefore” comes right on the heels of basically being slandered: “Therefore, they stayed a long time.” Why did they stay a long time? Because there were people there who needed to hear the message of the Gospel, and the text says that many of those believed. There was this cosmic war for the eternal souls of people at stake and they recognized that. They stayed and God honored that.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, they were proclaiming this wonderful message of grace accompanied by signs and wonders. We have seen that several times in the Book of Acts. God allowed these apostles to do miraculous things—not to show off, but to affirm the messenger and to show that this is the life-changing power of God—and these men demonstrated it through signs and wonders.

Of course that raises the question: Are there signs and wonders today? In my opinion that is a little bit of a difficult question to answer. There is no question that God is still a miracle-working God. We do not doubt that at all. But is God doing signs and wonders through people in the same way that He did it in the Book of Acts? There would be those who would say, “Absolutely.” There is a signs and wonders movement. My struggle with that is when you investigate what they are calling “signs and wonders” it does not seem to come close to living up to what you see in the Book of Acts.

At the other end of the continuum is what sometimes is referred to as the cessationist belief, meaning that sign gifts ceased. Most of the people in our movement would be identified with that—that the tongues, miracles and those gifts ceased. My position would be that I just do not know. The reality is when the cessationists put forth their text to support their belief, they are really weak at best. I am not convinced that is what the text is saying. I do not want to put God in a box and say God cannot do something that God might want to do. My informed opinion is that I don’t know. God can do what He wants. I do not want to put God in a box. The record of history would seem to indicate that they have ceased. I have never seen evidence that would convince me that things are happening today the same way that they happened during the time of the apostles.

One of the stances that I would be emphatic about is let's not water down modern-day experiences and say they are like they were in the Book of Acts, because that diminishes the miracles that happened in the Book of Acts. The Book of Acts and the gift of tongues was a miraculous ability to speak a foreign language. It was not some sort of ecstatic prayer language. That is not the same thing. What happened in Acts could not be faked; it could not be learned. It was a miracle, so let's not water it down to something that it wasn't.

I think the same thing with signs and wonders. I have not been convinced that there is evidence that things are happening in the same way that they were happening in the Book of Acts, with these dramatic overwhelming miracles that oftentimes included dozens or even hundreds of people at a time. My definitive position would be, "I don't know. I don't want to put God in a box. God can do what He wants, and in some places in the world He may very well be doing that."

The people were divided between the apostles and the religious Jews. Paul and Barnabas get word that they are going to try and kill them and so they leave town and go to the next town.

In light of what we are experiencing in our culture today through the religion of Islam, this is a very interesting comment. We are convinced through the media and through the religion of Islam that somehow God gives extra points when you die for your faith and even more points when you strap a bomb to yourself and blow up a bunch of innocent people. But that is not the God of the Bible. God does not give extra points for martyrdom. There is a sense in which Paul and Barnabas used prudence; they used wisdom. There was a chance to leave town, go to the next town and proclaim the message, and they took off. There will be other occasions, even in this text, where there was no escape and they had to take their stand for Christ. But there is not anything in the Bible that would tell us that God gives extra points for putting yourself in a position where you die for your faith. If you can get out, if you can escape, then so be it. And that is exactly what they do.

They move on to the surrounding cities, which actually were more like backwater towns. These people were highly uneducated. They were not cities like they had previously visited. They were people who were hungry to know the truth.

At Lystra a man was sitting who had no strength in his feet, lame from his mother's womb, who had never walked. This man was listening to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze on him and had seen that he had faith to be made well, said with a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he leaped up and began to walk. When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have become like men and have come down to us." And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. (vs. 8-13)

Paul and Barnabas get into the city of Lystra and there is a man who is clearly crippled. As a matter of fact, Luke, a medical doctor, repeats three times how serious this position was. He says he was a man who had (1) no strength in his feet, (2) was lame from his mother's womb, and (3) a man who had never walked. This is not one of those miracles that we hear today where somebody has a leg that is a little longer than the other. This was someone who clearly everybody knew was crippled and there was no doubt about it. The word for Paul speaking does

not mean preaching. It means conversation. Paul is standing there conversing with people about the Gospel and this man is overhearing the conversation. In his heart, he hears it and he believes it.

The text says that Paul basically looked into his heart and knew that he believed it. You might ask the question: How did he know that? The answer would be that is just as much a miracle as the healing. I do not have the ability to look at somebody and know if they believe or not. But these were miraculous times, and I think that is part of the miracle. Paul looked and could see into his heart. He knew that he believed the message, and what followed was this healing that I think was symbolic of a greater healing that had just taken place in this man's soul. How could these people see the life-changing power of Jesus? To see it physically was in essence a picture of that.

So he is healed and immediately the crowd responds. They identify Paul and Barnabas as these Greek gods. You might ask why they had such a strange response. Right outside the city of Lystra was the temple to Zeus. Included with that was a legend that had been told for generations and generations that there was a time when these Greek gods actually became flesh and entered the city. They began knocking on doors to see if anyone would take them in. Family after family after family turned them away. Finally they knocked at the door of an elderly couple who was very poor and barely had enough food to survive. This elderly couple led them in, fed them, shared what little they had and gave them a place to stay. The legend went on to say that the gods blessed them greatly and wiped out everybody else. These people lived in the fear that one day the gods would do that again, and if the gods ever did that again they would not make that mistake again.

So here come these two guys. They are talking about God and they do this miraculous healing. The immediate thought was that the gods had become flesh again. They did not want to make the same mistake. They respond to them very powerfully. When Luke tells us that they were speaking in the Lycaonian language, I think it is a way of saying that Paul and Barnabas did not know what was going on. They did not speak this language. They did not understand all of this. It wasn't until the priests came to offer a sacrifice that they put it together and realized what was happening and quickly tried to stop it.

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God. (vs. 14-15a)

This is a very similar response to Peter's in Acts 10. Immediately there is an attempt to stop this and to identify themselves as just ordinary men and to say that this is the power of God flowing through them and that God must receive the glory.

You remember the story of Herod when he was waxing eloquently and the people were saying, "He does not sound like a man. He sounds like a god." And Herod would say, "You know, I do sound like a god; I think maybe I am." And God struck him.

We have talked about this multiple times. One of the biggest problems when God uses us as instruments to do something powerful is that we have a tendency to want to steal the glory. We forget it was God through us, not us who was accomplishing the work. And God does not share His glory.

There is a tendency when people who are spiritually hungry find what they are looking for through your ministry and through your involvement to respond to you in a way that is inappropriate, giving you way too much credit and not seeing God's power and God's glory in what happened. It is very important in those moments that we respond correctly because there is a part of us that likes that. "Oh, Pastor Bryan, that was awesome." *It was pretty good. I must be awesome.* All of a sudden that starts messing with your head. You forget that this was 100% God going through a human instrument. I cannot control how people respond. But I can control how I respond back. I would suggest to you that more of my peers (preachers) this year will be rendered ineffective in ministry because of arrogance and pride than because of immorality. Oftentimes I am convinced that God limits what He can do through us because of what it does to our heads. If we were not committed to stealing the glory, God could do a whole lot more through human instruments.

That is exactly what happens here. Paul and Barnabas turn their attention back to God, telling them that rather than this vain empty idol, they could know the living God. They say, "He is the...

"...God, WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM. In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." Even saying these things, with difficulty they restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them. (vs. 15b-18)

One of the things that I have mentioned several times in the Book of Acts is how interesting it is that the different speakers—whether it is Stephen, Peter or now Paul—changed their Gospel presentation depending upon who the audience was. They did not just have a packaged formula that they dumped on everybody. We saw that Peter, Stephen and Paul, all three of them, when they were speaking to a Jewish audience went back to the Old Testament Scriptures and walked their way back through them. They reminded the audience that Jesus is the perfect fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures—that He is the Messiah, He is the Savior. That would make sense to that audience.

But if Paul did that here to this uneducated, irreligious Greek audience, it would make no sense to them. They did not know anything about the Old Testament, and frankly they probably could have cared less. So Paul meets them where they are and begins to talk about the Creator God. He is telling them there is a God who has created everything and that is the God he is talking about.

Romans 1 says that God has made Himself known through what He has created, so all people are without excuse. Nobody can say, "I did not know there was a God," because the evidence of God is everywhere. Every culture that has ever existed in the history of humanity has had some sense of this. Oftentimes they have strange views of God or the gods but there is a sense that we are rather than are not. There has to be some explanation. Why is there something rather than nothing? Where did all this come from? There has got to be some explanation for this.

The theory of naturalistic evolution is a cause and effect theory. It does not matter how many billions of years you put on it, at some point you have to start with a cause. You cannot start with an effect—that is illogical. We call it the uncaused cause. No matter how you slice it, this had to be God. The reality is that everybody can identify in some way with the fact that there has to be some explanation for why there is something rather than nothing.

Paul starts there in a place that would have made sense to these people. He talks to them about the fact that God, even though He let the generations of the nations go their own way, did not abandon them or hide from them. It was just the opposite. He has made Himself known by doing good. The verb tenses are actually “by continually giving you reign, continually giving you fruitful seasons, continually giving satisfaction to your hearts through food and provision.” These people would identify there has to be some explanation for that. That was his presentation.

I think sometimes we make presenting the Gospel way too hard. If we think about what we have learned in the Book of Acts we can distill it down into two very simple principles. Think about it this way: Whenever you talk to somebody about the Gospel, you are going to talk to one of two types of people.

One type is somebody who is very religiously oriented and has grown up in a church environment and is very religious. These people are often very difficult to talk to. They have their religions. They don't really want to think about it. They don't want to be challenged. They have all their religious rituals down. Sometimes they are not real open to discussion. The best way to reach this type of person is to continually ask them in a very loving, caring way, “That is very interesting. Can you show me where you find that in the Bible? That is very interesting. How do you support that from the Scripture?” Most of these people do still see the Scriptures as being credible.

Don't get into big arguments about their denomination and all of this, but just ask them consistently, “That is very interesting. How do you support that from the Bible?” When I talk to these people I sound like a broken record. What it gets them to start thinking about is: Where do we get these beliefs and where does that come from? That is much better than getting in some sort of a religious argument that just makes them angry. They may not respond to you at all. But they may go home and open up their Bible and think, *Where do we get this stuff?* If they start to read their Bible, then something is happening and God can take it from there and good things will happen. That is really the goal. Just get them to open up their own Bible and read it.

But when you are talking to irreligious people, people who really do not have a church background and they aren't terribly interested in the Bible, you have to use a different approach. The best way to do that, I think, is to get to know them. Don't have some canned approach that you are ready to dump on them but talk to them and ask them questions. Find out who they are and find out what their interests are. Find out about their hopes and dreams. Find out where their pain is. Find out where their struggle is. Where are their disappointments and where has life let them down? Begin to think, *Where does God intersect with that person's life?*

One thing we know for sure is that if they do not know Jesus, their soul is dissatisfied and they are not happy. As much as they try to convince you otherwise, they just have a restless soul. You believe that by faith. You try to figure out how that manifests itself and then try to help them understand how God intersects that part of their lives.

That is maybe oversimplified, but basically you are going to run into two types of people. From the Book of Acts, those would be the two different strategies.

Verse 19:

But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. But while

the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe. (vs. 19-20)

This is one of my favorite texts in Acts just because of the way it is recorded. You would have to admit that this is a big, big deal. This is the Apostle Paul. This is the great missionary. Here we have a text where he is stoned, and commentators argue about whether he was stoned to death or they just thought he was dead. But either way, for all practical purposes, he was dead. And all Luke tells us is, “He popped up, brushed himself off, went back to town and to the next city.”

We find ourselves thinking, *I would really like to know a little more here.* This seems pretty dramatic. We talked about when Stephen was stoned. A stoning was an ugly, bloody, brutal process. We see these Christian movies where a stone glances off of somebody’s head, they fall over dead and everybody walks away. That is not the way it was. It would have taken a long time and it was one stone after another. It was just an ugly, bloody, brutal death. Paul had no idea he was going to be healed. For all he knew, this was the end of the road. Do you suppose in his mind he remembered when he stood there and watched Stephen stoned to death and watched how Stephen died? I think he probably did. All we are told is that he was stoned. He appears to be dead. He is taken outside of town. The disciples are all gathered around. This means the believers who had come to Christ there because of the ministry have to be just absolutely horrified. Barnabas has got to be beside himself. Paul pops up, brushes himself off and heads back to town. The next day he is off to Derbe: “You can’t stop me.”

Why does Luke do it that way? Why doesn’t he linger and draw this thing out and make it much more dramatic? It would really make a great story, wouldn’t it? We could get everybody on the edge of their seat, *Wow, wasn’t that fantastic!* I think the point Luke is trying to make is that this is a picture of the unstoppable missionaries of God. The point is not on this. The point is on God and His mission. He does not linger there because he does not want to linger there. It is this continuous emphasis on the mission. Until God was done with Paul and Barnabas, there was no stopping them. Up he got, walked on to the next city; mission accomplished.

If this happened in today’s culture, let me tell you how it would unfold. Pretty soon the media would become aware of it and then the story would start to get out. Then Paul would appear on a number of talk shows. He would be on Larry King and he would end up on TBN and all these different shows. People would be amazed and doing a lot of “Praise God!” It would all be very exciting. Then a publisher would find him and talk him into making it into a book. Then it would be made into a church curriculum with DVDs and small group studies. On and on it would go. Then he would do the circuits and go to all the main speaking events. All of a sudden, this would consume his life. The enemy would sit back and smile because he rendered the most effective missionary in history ineffective. He took him out of the trenches and made him a celebrity.

I have to be a little bit careful here because sometimes God calls people to that. I understand that, and I cannot judge that. But I would suggest to you that many of the most effective pastors, because of what God has done, have been pulled out of the trenches and have been made celebrities. That pretty much puts an end to their effectiveness in accomplishing the mission.

For myself, I realized this several years ago, and I need to be very careful that I understand what God has called me to and that I stay true to that. Part of what I did was pull myself off of all other boards. I rarely take speaking engagements. I want to be true to what I believe God has called me to. It is easy to be distracted with all these other things that are out there, but that is not what God has called me to. There are many good things but it may not be the main thing.

The same is true of you. You need to understand what God has called you to. There are 101 things out there that can distract you, and they may be good things. It may flow out of what God has done through you. But all of a sudden you find yourself doing some good things and somewhere along the way you lost sight of the main thing. We find ourselves distracted.

I think that is Luke's point. The main thing was the mission, so he does not linger here. Paul goes to Derbe and, "Let's get on with this thing."

After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (vs. 21-23)

Paul makes the loop out and then he makes the loop back. How exactly he got back through these cities without getting caught when they wanted to kill him, I don't know—but he seemed to manage that. He encouraged the believers, he strengthened them and appointed elders. We tried to make the case in Acts 6 that an effective church is an organized church and this certainly supports that. They were not left to just struggle on their own. There was leadership in place and they quickly organized themselves to be effective. He works his way all the way back to where they started.

They passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia. When they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. From there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished. When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they spent a long time with the disciples. (vs. 24-28)

They come back to Antioch, which was the sending church, and they have this great celebration. It is the first real missions conference. They talked about what God has done, how God has changed the life of these Gentiles, and I am sure they talked about the struggles and the hardships. But at the end of the day, they celebrated. God is at work changing the world. You just get the feeling that there was a tremendous amount of joy and satisfaction in this church, knowing they had been a part of something that would last forever.

There is something about being out in the trenches, experiencing the opposition, trusting God and seeing people's lives changed, and then coming back together with the people of God and knowing that you have been a part of something eternal, part of something special. We share that together. It is unlike any other feeling. That is a big part of what drives worship—living life in the trenches and experiencing the reality of that, the opposition and all that goes with that—but then coming together with a sense of excitement that God is among us. God is changing people and we are engaged in this thing together.

There are a lot of Christians who do not really feel that celebration. As a matter of fact, there are a lot of Christians who are just plain bored. They are bored with their Christian walk. They are bored with the Bible. They are bored with prayer. They are bored with worship. They are bored with the church. They are bored with everything. If that happens to describe you, let me suggest that somewhere along the way you have been distracted.

Don't misunderstand me. I am not asking you if you are involved in some gross sinful immorality. I am just asking you: Is it possible that somewhere along the way you settled into some good things and lost sight of the main thing? I do not know anybody who is doing the work in the trenches that is bored. I do not know anybody who is doing the work in the trenches that does not go to the Scripture on a regular basis. They *have* to; they are in over their heads. They are overwhelmed. I do not know anybody who is in the trenches that is not regularly praying. I do not know anybody in the trenches who does not long to get together with the people of God. They need to be strengthened and encouraged. They need that. I do not know anybody out in the trenches that does not find celebration and joy in worship. If you find yourself bored, it is probably because you have settled into a good lifestyle.

It is very easy to think, *I am a good person. I do good things; I don't get involved in bad things. And pretty much everything is good and that is the definition of a Christian.* That is not even close to the definition of a Christian. You can be doing all those things and still be missing the point. Just because you are a good person doing good things does not mean you have anything to do with the main thing.

It is easy to say, "Well, that is not me. I am not distracted." Really? When was the last time you shared Jesus with somebody? Let's be honest. How long has it been since you went eyeball-to-eyeball with somebody and told them about the life-changing message of Jesus? If it has been awhile, I would suggest that you are distracted. You have settled in. Probably because of that you are bored with a lot of things in your Christian walk.

The message of Acts from beginning to end is this commitment to the eternal mission, empowered by the Spirit of God to proclaim the message of Jesus that people's lives will be changed forever. One day when we stand before God, I will guarantee you that is what matters. He is going to say, "This was the mission. I appreciate all those good things, but this was the assignment."

I am just asking you to consider: Is it possible you have been distracted and is it possible that you need to re-up a little bit with your focus on what the mission is? My prayer is that for every one of us we would understand what the mission is and that one day when we stand before God we will say, "God, I understood what the mission was and it was for that purpose that I lived."

*Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE
Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988,
The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
Copyright 2006 – Bryan Clark. All rights reserved.

April 1/2, 2006

Study Questions
The Unstoppable Church
Unstoppable Missionaries
Acts 14:1-28
Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. The unstoppable Church is made up of unstoppable missionaries. We are missionaries to the marketplace, schools, foreign countries, etc. What do you think of when you think of an unstoppable missionary?
2. What should you expect from others if you are going to take seriously our call to be witnesses to the unbelievers around us?
3. Does the Gospel unite or divide?

Bible Study

1. Read Acts 14:1-28. This text is really the completion of Acts 13. In other words, Acts 13-14 are one unit of thought. What was the central theme of Acts 13?
2. Summarize what transpired in Iconium.

What do we learn from this story?

What should we expect when we proclaim the truth of God's grace?

3. Compare Paul and Barnabas' reaction to the claim of the crowds that they (Paul and Barnabas) were gods with Herod's reaction in Acts 12. (Also remember Peter's reaction in Acts 10.) The enemy will do whatever he can to render us ineffective in our mission. If he cannot intimidate us into not proclaiming the message, he can fill us with pride and render us ineffective. What practical things can you do to avoid being filled with pride when God uses you as His instrument to accomplish something great for Him?

In what way is pride in conflict with a message of grace?

4. Why does Luke not dwell on Paul's stoning and miraculous healing by not giving us any details?

What does Luke want the readers to focus on in this text?

5. The Church in Antioch celebrated the return of their missionaries after a successful mission. What did John Mark miss by returning home early?

What do we miss when we fail to have the courage to fulfill the mission we have been given?

Can you really know the joy of victory without the courage to engage in the battle?

Application

1. What words would you use to describe the attitude necessary for anyone to be effective in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus to unbelievers?
2. List five things from this text that you can expect if you're going to take your calling to be a missionary for Jesus seriously. (These can be positive or negative.)
3. Who specifically are you going to invite to Easter and the four follow-up weeks? Be prayerfully considering who God would have you invite. Remember, there are invitations available to distribute to those you believe God would have you invite this Easter.

Note: This is the last lesson on Acts until September. Because of the emphasis on prayer in the book of Acts and at LBC this year, we're making available a six-part LifeGroup study entitled *Jesus on Prayer*. If you are not in a LifeGroup, this study would also be good for family devotions. These lessons can be emailed to you, or you can pick them up from the Publication Center in the foyer. If you would like a copy emailed to you, please email marmstrong@lincolnberean.org making this request.