

A Study of the Acts of the Apostles
Week Seventeen
Acts 13:36-14:13

Day One

36 "For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed. 37 But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay. 38 "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. 39 Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.

v. 36 – That represents my objective: to serve God’s purpose for me in my own generation. Yet when you think of it, David is still impacting future generations because he was faithful in his own. Of course, Paul wasn’t talking about purpose here, but rather showing the promise that God’s Holy One would not see decay was *not* a promise fulfilled by any king of Israel.

v. 37 – Paul was passionate about Jesus. Everything he did was geared to make Jesus more prominent in the minds of those with whom he worked and to whom he spoke. And this fact is why Jesus deserves our worship and full attention and energy: He lives forever. Every other cause, leader and movement will pass away and decay, but the One who was raised from the dead lives forever and is worthy of our lives.

v. 38 – I have often said that some have made Jesus so heavenly that He’s no earthly good. Jesus is a man like you and me, sinless and with glorified flesh. We can go to him because He is alive and because He has is aware of our human condition from His own personal experience:

In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises." And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again he says, "Here am I, and the children God has given me." Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Are you taking full advantage of Jesus’ humanity, calling on Him to help you in times of trouble and distress? Or have you exalted Jesus to such a place in your thinking that He is too distant, unapproachable and “holy” to help a sinner like

you? I urge you to identify with Jesus in His humanity and see Him as an eternal source of grace, mercy and love.

v. 39 – Jesus does what the Law could never do. Paul presented His listeners with a better way to God and righteousness than they currently had. For someone who wants to earn his or her salvation, Jesus isn't the way. But for someone who sees their need for God and forgiveness of sins, then Jesus is the only way!

Day Two

40 Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you: 41 "Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you." 42 As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. 43 When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

vs. 40&41 – Paul warned his listeners not to fall prey to what the prophets had warned them about: scoffing at what God is doing. When someone scoffs, they are saying that they know everything God would do and what is happening isn't real or from the Lord. Do you know any people like that? For someone to say, "God would never do that" means that they know everything that God would and would not do! No one is that smart or spiritual. Now I am not talking about extra-biblical things. There can be no revelation apart from Jesus, His role and work. But beyond that, God is always doing new things, such as reaching certain people that others say are unreachable. He is also raising up leaders with fresh perspectives on His unchanging word, and innovators who include drama, music and other creative media in worship events.

I want to be firmly grounded in the Scriptures, but then also be open to all that the Lord is doing on the earth. What God is doing may not be to my liking or preference, but that doesn't mean I should dismiss it and scoff.

v. 42 – Paul and Barnabas had to be encouraged, for they were invited back the next Sabbath to discuss these matters further. I think they both understood that you must go where you are celebrated and not tolerated if you are going to be effective. That goes for anyone. I have spent too much of my life trying to open doors that were closed and too little time going through doors that were opening for me. **Do you understand the difference? I'm not saying that things will be easy when you walk through an open door, but it's easier doing that than trying to open a locked door.**

For instance, I just did a seminar here in Kenya and had 85 paid registrants. I did one last month in the United States for free and had 12 people. Where am I and where is my message tolerated? Where am I celebrated? Where do you think it wise that I invest the limited time that I am allotted? Where is it wise for you to do the same?

Notice that the people and not the leaders invited Paul and Barnabas to return. Don't ever underestimate the spirituality of people who aren't in leadership. They hear from the Lord, too.

v. 43 – People wanted to hear more, so they took the initiative to follow the missionaries. It is always best to invest your time and effort in those who are interested, whether you're working with the gospel, a business idea or with students. Jesus was trying to tell us this when he said:

"Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces" (Matthew 7:6).

Are you wasting your time with something or someone? What can you do to curtail that waste of time?

Day Three

44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. 45 When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. 46 Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. 47 For this is what the Lord has commanded us: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."

v. 44 – I wonder if this is to be taken literally? I am not suggesting that Luke exaggerated, but this may have been a saying of the times that simply suggested a large crowd came together. When there is a large quantify of something here in Africa, someone may say, "Potatoes for Africa." That doesn't mean there are enough potatoes to feed all of Africa. But God did grant the missionaries a large audience, which should always be our goal. We must never despise reaching one, but we must reject reaching one when it is possible to reach 100. I have found, too, that it is just as easy to speak to 1,000 as 100, so I try to do that whenever God enables.

v. 45 – Ministry jealousy is still with us today. One individual or denomination envies the results of another so they speak abusively against them. I try to stay focused and not talk against the success of another. At the same time, I don't turn a blind eye to what may be happening that isn't of the Spirit of Jesus. I feel like I can speak my concerns without talking abusively. **Is this possible? Can we discuss what is happening in the Church with openness without being critical or abusive?** I think it comes down to one's motives. And it is always easier if that input is requested. **So can you make room for people to discuss what God is doing in and through you without you being defensive? Can you be open to the feedback of those around you?**

v. 46 – Paul and Barnabas felt a great debt to the Jews, from whom they came and from whom they inherited the prophetic promises. But when the Jews got abusive, they spoke honestly and directly and were no longer wishing to waste their time by defending their ministry. So they turned to the Gentiles. We pointed out in many studies how rigid the Jews had become, seeing themselves as owners of God instead of stewards of God’s promises. The Jews weren’t happy that God was reaching out to Gentiles. In fact, they opposed it more often than not. It is possible to be prejudiced against other people or people groups and still call yourself a follower of Jesus. **Is there any group with which you would not be happy to see God blessing them? If there is, then you need to see this as sin and repent. God loves all the people groups of the earth and we must do the same, no matter what crimes they have perpetrated against you or your own people group.**

v. 47 – Paul and Barnabas quoted Isaiah 49:6, but personalized it when they said, “The Lord commanded *us*.” In fact in every epistle he wrote, Paul used some Old Testament passage to justify his work among the Gentiles. Do you have biblical verification and authorization for what you do? Jesus did as well, for he read Isaiah 61 in the synagogue one day to describe his life’s mission:

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:16-19).

My theory is that everyone has a biblical verse or passage that describes what they were created to do. My purpose is to create order out of chaos and my “verse” is found in Genesis 1:2:

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

Can you identify your personal passage? Is there one that is full of meaning and direction for you? I urge you to find it and, when you do, declare it to anyone who will listen. Use it to give yourself confidence that you are doing not just what you like, but you are doing the very will of God!

Day Four

48 When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. 49 The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. 50 But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. 51 So they shook the dust from their feet in protest

against them and went to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

v. 48 – This verse would seem to indicate that there were some who were pre-appointed by God to be saved and that they were. This isn't the sense of this at all. The Jews had dishonored God's word and thus weren't saved. The Gentiles fulfilled the requirements for salvation and that was that they were open to God. Thus they were appointed to eternal life because they were willing to fulfill the one requirement for that life: that requirement was faith in Jesus. Anyone who has faith in Jesus has been appointed to eternal life.

v. 49 – The word of God spread throughout the region. I heard a man say one time that God is an expansionist; He desires all people to know Him. Thus God does not object to large numbers and mass crusades. Is there room in your heart to large numbers and more people? Or do you and your church have the attitude, "Us four and no more"? I have known many churches who were opposed to more people until they "got it right" in their walk with the Lord—whatever that means. If you aren't open to more people, you won't work to have more people. Your building, theology, services, attitude and programs will speak of this exclusive attitude. I have known other churches who communicated the attitude, "if anyone wants us, they will have to come find us; and we're not going to make that easy." **What are you doing to reach more people for Jesus? Are there any attitudes you have that will prevent this from happening?**

v. 50 – The Jews who had rejected the message now became more aggressive in their opposition. They stirred up the region's leaders and people of influence who then expelled Paul and Barnabas from the region. I have always seen the hand of God in this. Even when Paul wanted to stay and settle in a region, the Spirit allowed opposition to arise to force Paul to stay on the move.

And I have seen this dynamic in my own life and ministry. I have wanted to stay put too long in one place. The best time to depart from a job, ministry or situation is when you're on top. If you wait too long and the situation begins to decline, you may start to redouble your efforts to make a declining situation work again. That is seldom productive or wise. **Have you overstayed your welcome or usefulness in any situation? Why are you so adverse to change at this point? What are you trying to prove? Why are we so resistant to change?**

There is one more point here: it is difficult to effect change when the leadership of a company, church, school or area doesn't want that change.

v. 51 – Luke used a saying that Jesus used in this verse when he said that they shook the dust off their feet and moved on:

If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town (Matthew 10:13-15).

Even Jesus urged his followers to make the most of their time and not waste their efforts on situations or people who were resistant to their purpose. Which brings me back to you. Are you resisting change and ignoring the reality that your situation isn't working and may even be deteriorating? Why can't you move on? What's keeping you there? I have told many people that it isn't good to be more committed to a situation than God is! Admit that it's not working and time to move on, and then move on in faith. God has something else for you to do.

v. 52 – The disciples were filled with joy because they weren't wasting their time trying to change a situation that didn't want to change. They were joyful and where there is joy, there is peace and effective ministry. **Are you happy? Do you have joy at this point in your life? If not, what price are you willing to pay to get that joy back? Is it time to let go of something so you can latch on to something else?**

Day Five

14:1 At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. 2 But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. 3 So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders. 4 The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles.

v. 1 – Paul was to repeat this strategy over and over again. He knew where he could go in most cities to find a receptive audience to talk about Jesus. He started there and moved out as opposition grew. **What is your strategy to achieve your purpose? Do you have one? Mine includes writing these Bible studies, the Monday Memo, books and conducting seminars.**

v. 2 – Are we beginning to see a pattern here? The apostles arrive, preach the gospel, have success, but then encounter varying degrees of spiritual opposition. Just because you are encountering opposition doesn't mean you're doing something wrong. On the contrary, it means that you're doing something right! Paul had written the Corinthians, stating the reality and tension of this truth:

But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me (1 Corinthians 16:7-9).

So are you now confused? On the one hand, I told you to not outstay your welcome in any situation or position, recognizing when it's time to move on. Now I tell you to expect opposition, that it is a sign that you are doing something correct. So which is it, Dr. Stanko? How can I know when to hang in there and when to move on?

I think the key is to be willing to do both! You remain willing to stay in the face of opposition, and willing to move on when you would want to stay, fight it out and be

victorious. There are no standard or pat answers to any situation you face; you must stay in tune with the Lord and respond immediately to what He says.

v. 3 – I would think that, while they faced opposition, the team was in no physical danger. I never see Paul risking his life needlessly. If things got that intense, he left. If things were heated but no immediate danger, he stayed. Paul was willing to give his life, but he wasn't going to waste the gift. After all, he only had one life to give, so he wanted to invest it, then yield it, wisely.

Paul and Barnabas did great miracles, which were God's way of affirming the message they preached. When you function in your purpose, God will always provide confirming signs that you are doing His will. Yet, not everyone will acknowledge those signs.

v. 4 – Not everyone will celebrate who God made you to be and what He gave you to do. So don't expect a parade when you do God's will. What's more, the proof God provides will only upset some people. It has always fascinated me that God's purposes can divide so many people, but Jesus predicted this when He said:

“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law— a man's enemies will be the members of his own household” (Matthew 10:34-36).

So don't be overly concerned with pleasing everyone; just focus on pleasing God. That will make some people happy and some not so happy.

Day Six

5 There was a plot afoot among the Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. 6 But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, 7 where they continued to preach the good news. 8 In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. 9 He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed 10 and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

v. 5 – Eventually, things got so intense that some hatched a plot to kill Paul and Barnabas. Notice that the Gentiles and Jews worked together on the plot. The Jews didn't want anything to do with the Gentiles, but here they were quite willing to receive help from the Gentiles. Some people who would not ordinarily work together will be united in their opposition to you and God's purpose in your life. It is similar to Pilate and Herod becoming friends after they both had contact with Jesus during His crucifixion.

vs. 6&7 – Here again we see the team escaping to save their lives, which is the rational and spiritual thing to do. And as stated earlier, the Spirit used this tendency to keep the team moving and reaching as many people and areas as possible. Paul and Barnabas

never stopped doing what they were commissioned to do, which was to preach to the Gentiles. My purpose is to create order out of chaos, which I am doing wherever and whenever possible. **What is your purpose? How often are you working in it? What steps can you take to do more?**

v. 8 – It was one thing for a Jew to be healed in Jerusalem; there was at least some biblical context for that to happen in the Old Testament. Here was a Gentile, who had no awareness of the Lord or His healing power, being healed as a sign of the reality of the team’s message. This man had never walked in his life!

vs. 9&10 – I wonder where Paul was speaking that this man was able to hear him speak? It must have been in a public place, with the lame seated nearby begging, as was their custom and only source of income. Paul saw that this man had faith to be healed. I wonder what Paul saw? Perhaps it was the eagerness and intentness with which the man listened. Or maybe Paul simply saw something in the Spirit and realized that this man was ready to receive a healing. But whatever Paul saw, he would not have seen it unless he was preaching the word, which is the source of all faith. I have to assume that Paul mentioned healing in his message:

Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ (Romans 10:17-18).

What do you have faith for? What is your current “Faith Project?” By that, I mean what are you standing in faith for at this point that will never happen unless God comes through? What did you hear to which you attached your faith? I have faith for a best-selling book. That is something only God can do. I must write it, but He must sell it, having given me the idea in the first place. We will see if I can achieve this faith goal in my lifetime. What is your faith goal?

Day Seven

11 When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" 12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. 13 The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.

v. 11 – As stated earlier, the crowd had no biblical background for Paul’s message or this miraculous healing. They were Gentiles, so they attributed the miracle to their gods. Years ago I went to Israel, where of course everything is so exciting and biblical. From there, I went to Athens, where everything is so spiritually insipid. Statues of false gods were everywhere! Suddenly I realized that this was something of the spiritual “shock” that Paul must have gone through as he left the comfort of Judaism to embrace his work in and among the heathen. Yet Paul never complained and embraced his purpose and call with vigor, even though it must have been tough for him to do.

While your purpose is exhilarating, where and how you express it may be the work of the cross in your life. You do what you love, but in ways and with people that you'd rather not be with!

v. 12 – The people did what they knew to do: They applied their current reality into the mental framework or worldview that they had. This was of course the context of the Greek gods, which they believed had come down to them in the form of the missionaries. What foolish thinking! Yet this is the power of what's called a paradigm—a model for understanding the reality around you. Not only did Paul have to preach salvation; he had to teach his converts a whole new way of thinking, which is called discipleship. **Have you been disciplined, or do you still have old ways of thinking that you are trying to fit the new things of God into?**

v. 13 – In some ways, this was a test for Paul and Barnabas, but of course they passed the test. Would they receive any of the glory for what they had done, or would they give it all to Jesus? The crowds were ready to install them as gods. The priest was ready to incorporate what they did into the framework of their local religions. Paul was always clear that what he did was for Jesus and Him alone. He wrote the Corinthians:

For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake (2 Corinthians 4:5).

Paul was far away from “home” and could have allowed some of the glory to be attributed to him and his ministry. But he did not! And that is why God used him so powerfully, for Paul was a true servant of God. He saw his calling in the context of the Old Testament prophets and that he was continuing their work and message, but to an expanded audience of Gentiles. What a great man Paul was! But Jesus was even greater and Paul's legacy is that we worship Jesus the Lamb while doing greater things than Jesus did.