

“AND THERE THEY PREACHED THE GOSPEL”

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Acts 14 finds Paul and Barnabas in Iconium speaking in the synagogue. They are making good progress until some unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds (Acts 14:2). This did not stop the intrepid pair of preachers, but it did divide the city into those for the Jews and those for the apostles. Paul got wind of a violent plan to stone them, so they fled. This, I believe, was a matter of being wise as serpents in the midst of wolves (Matthew 10:16).

The text (Acts 14:6) says that they went to Lystra and Derbe, which were cities of Lycaonia. It is here that we find our title text: “And there they preached the gospel” (Acts 14:7). We find this verse typeset by itself in the King James translation. It seems to me fitting that it is, for this sums up what Paul and Barnabas were doing there in those towns. It is also a summation of Paul’s work in other places; indeed, it is a powerful summation of his life as a Christian (2 Timothy 4:6-8). When we think about it, this little statement,

“And there they preached the gospel” ought to summarize the work and life of preachers, congregations and Christians everywhere. “And there they preached the gospel.” Think about that for a moment. How was it that they were where they were? Bottom line, they were there because they had been run out of where they had been working before. It was not much a matter of choice. But they found themselves at Lystra and Derbe and so they went to work. It reminds us that wherever we are, we are in a good place to preach the gospel.

“And there they preached the gospel.” The “they” here is obviously Paul and Barnabas. They are the men who had the opportunity to preach the gospel. They did not allow their previous experiences to discourage them. They did not wait around for reinforcements from Antioch or Jerusalem. Those men found themselves in a new place, so they started preaching. There would be trouble here too, but that did not stop them.

Just as was the case with Paul and Barnabas, there comes a time for each of us when we have to face the responsibility of opportunity. We must not allow ourselves to avoid the opportunities God places before us. You and I may find ourselves in our own Lystra and Derbe. It may be like Mordecai told Esther, “you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this” (Esther 5:14). Don’t wait for the preacher or for a supposed “better time.”

“And there they preached the gospel.” There are times to teach the gospel. There are times to sit down and talk about the gospel. There are times to read the gospel. There are times to study the gospel. But there are also times to just preach it! 1 Corinthians 1:18-32 teaches that preaching gospel is just the thing that the world needs, even if it does not particularly want it. In another place, Paul said: “Preach the Word” (2 Timothy 4:2). The world may not think much of preaching (or preachers, for that matter) but preaching is still the method God chose to present His Word.

“And there they preached the gospel.” The gospel is the good news that Jesus has come to save man for sin (John 3:16, Matthew 1:21). The gospel is the “power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16). People are saved when they obey the gospel (Romans 16:26, 6:1-18, Hebrews 5:8-9) and lost when they departed” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Here is the point: Because they preached the gospel there and then, we preach the gospel here and now.