

WEEKLY REFLECTION

How do you react to the gospel? How do you react when things go well? How do you react when things *don't* go well? We mentioned last week different responses to the gospel, and see some examples in this week's passage as well: the unbelieving Jews at Iconium who stirred up the Gentiles (Acts 14:2, 4-5) , and the people at Lystra who wanted to shower Paul and Barnabas with their worship (v.11).

It's truly a mixed bag of reactions, but we see Paul and Barnabas responding with steadfast devotion to the Lord throughout it all. Although the Jews incited the Gentiles against them both, they remained for a long time at Iconium, speaking boldly for the Lord. (v.3) They flee only when they learn that the people of the city are trying to stone them to death, and continue to preach the gospel in surrounding territories. (v.6) They tear their garments and rush into the crowd at Lystra when they learn of the people's plans to worship them (v.15), because they are distraught that they should worship the made things instead of the Maker. It's astonishing what follows, that Jews from Antioch and Iconium persuade the crowds at Lystra to stone Paul and to leave him for dead (v.19), but even then—even then!—Paul rose back up and entered the city. (v.20) He went and continued to preach the gospel in the next city. (v.21)

Church, this is the response of a man who cared for nothing but God. After his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul recognized that everything else was worth nothing compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus—and it shows! (Phil. 3:8) Nothing, not mistreatment or abuse, nor the worship that people wanted to shower him with, or even his own life forfeit would deter him from preaching Christ glorified. Do we have that same all-encompassing love for God? As we share the gospel, can we say the same about ourselves?

QUESTIONS

QUESTION ONE:

Paul is speaking to an entirely new people group in verses 15-17, Gentiles who neither know nor trust the Bible. How does Paul make his case here to persuade these people towards truth? What arguments, examples, and authorities does he include in this gospel presentation? If you were Paul, what else would you have said to help them better understand the gospel?

QUESTION TWO:

It was mentioned during the sermon that the Roman poet Ovid wrote a story about Jupiter (Zeus) and Mercury (Hermes), who had visited the area disguised as human travellers. They went from house to house in search of food and lodging, but were refused a thousand times. In the end, they were taken in by an elderly couple who were rewarded for their hospitality and spared from a flood that devastated the rest of the region.

Although it is easy to assume that the people of Lystra were offering oxen, garlands, and sacrifices as worship to their gods, they may also have been trying to avoid punishment. Would you consider your relationship with God a transactional one? Is there anything that you do or don't do for the sake of avoiding punishment? Do you offer or do certain things in the hopes of getting certain things from Him?

QUESTION THREE:

Paul was able to look beyond mistreatment and abuse, and even an attempt on his life because of his dedication to the gospel. Have you refrained from having Jesus conversations out of a fear of people's responses? Do you find yourself living the same way inside and outside of church, or do you modify your speech and actions to be more "holy" when in a faith-based setting? How might Paul's one-track mind for God inspire you to live boldly and freely for Christ?