

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

Date: 07 May 2023
Services: *Across the diocese*
Series: Saved by grace (Acts 10-28)
Passage: Acts 14
Title: Worthless idols (vs the Living God)
Outline:

Mission today is:

1. **Tough**
2. **We must be flexible**
3. **Entirely God's mission – God's work**

- it has become absolutely clear in recent years, that we live in a world which is increasingly hostile to the Christian faith and Christian values, and there are strong moves to censor anyone who dares to disagree with the prevailing secular thinking...
- think of the incident in Victoria last year, when Andrew Thorburn was forced to stand down as CEO of Essendon, just one day after his appointment, because of he chaired the parish council of City on a Hill... and something that had been preached at that church 13 years earlier!!
- It is abundantly clear in the West, that we are living in a **post-Christian** world...
- What I mean by that is that we used to consider that the world – our nation **Australia** – was basically **Christian**...
- ...but now we know that it is definitely **not** that... and that **Christians** and the **church** and Christians **leaders** have gone from being **'go to' people** whose opinions and insights mattered, to being **marginalised**, and now, considered a **danger** to society and being put down as such.
- We have lost our **place** at the **table** and our **voice** in **society**. //
- Now – some of that is absolutely **deserved**... the **Royal commission** into instructional responses to sexual abuse – was just **horrible** in its expose of some of the **darkest deeds imaginable** perpetrated by those who were **leaders** in the **church**...
- And what we are seeing now, is that we live in a world that is in fact much **more** like the world of the **1st century**...
- The **post-Christian** world bears many **similarities** to the **pre-Christian** world we read of in the book of **Acts**...
- Christians are not in the **mainstream**... the church movement is seen as a **threat**... forces are at work to **silence** Christians... **persecute** Christians – **kill** Christians...
- The parallels are **real**...
- And it's with **that** background today, that I want to show you from Acts 14 (and to remind you) that doing mission in a secular world is
 1. **Tough**
 2. **It needs to be flexible**
 3. **But it remains God's mission.**
- So first...

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1. IT'S TOUGH

- So you'll recall at the end of Ch 13 last week, we saw that Paul and Barnabas were run out of Antioch and that they headed to Iconium
- Paul sticks to his policy of heading to the **synagogue first**
- ...and he had a great time there... v1 *a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.*
- ...so encouraging... **BUT!**
- v2 *But the Jews who **refused** to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers...*
- So we continue to see this **dual impact** whenever the good news is proclaimed... some are **drawn** to it – others – **repelled** by it...
- ...not only **repelled** by it – but take others with them... **poison others** along the way... //
- if you engage in social media at all today and see some of the comments on Facebook or Twitter whenever something from Christians or church is mentioned... then the highhanded, dismissive, vile attitude of many towards anything Christian is **very disturbing... //**
- but what did Paul and Barnabas **do** in the face of such opposition...?
- v3 *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.*
- I would have run the other **way!** – they **stayed on!**
- And their **staying** – will you note – only caused **more** division – v4 *the people of the city were divided; some sided with the **Jews**, others with the **apostles**.*
- Then comes a plot to **mistreat** them and **stone** them....
- ...so they fled to **Lystra** and **Derbe** and the *surrounding country **where they continued to preach the good news***
- mission in a secular world is **tough... //**
- and people today are so totally **confused** as to **what** and **why** they believe... and they are **gullible** – so **easily** led astray...
- ...they are so sure we are **wrong**... and **dangerous** - but have never taken the time to **investigate** anything for **themselves**...
- ... so their opposition is often **ignorant** and **ill-informed**.
- and they are so **invested** in the power of **worthless idols**... (I don't mean 1st century idols... but modern idols such as power, career, success, influence, sport, family etc).... So caught up in these, that they can see **nothing** of the true power of the Lord **Jesus**... //
- and so we read in this next section how Paul was an instrument in God's hand in the miraculous healing of a cripple and when the crowd saw what happened, their first thought is that the gods **Zeus** and **Hermes** have come in human form... and they bring sacrifices and to them and want to worship them...
- which of course Barnabas and Paul immediately **refuse**... as Peter had done with Cornelius, proclaiming that they are only **men**...

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- Paul speaks to them (we'll come back to that shortly) and although they still want to sacrifice them because they still consider them to be gods - so **fickle** is this crowd - that when some Jews come down from **Antioch** and **Iconium** they are able to **completely change** the crowd's view of Paul and they set about to do what they **wanted** to do before – namely – **stone Paul...**
- v20 – what happens **then?** – *he got up and went back into the city...* before heading off the next day to Derbe.
- Paul **himself** reflects on how tough it is... v22 - *We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God* he warns the churches...
- In his **letters** he records **some** of what he went through in his ministry... do you recall? From shipwrecks to lashings, to going without food... and much more of which you can read in 2 Corinthians 11:24-27
- It's **tough!** //
- Now - **Paul's** calling is **not ours...**
- But I have **no doubt** that if we are living **faithfully** in our calling to be **disciples...** if we are people who don't **compromise...** who take a **stand** for what we believe... then **sooner** or **later** – we will find it **tough...!**
- We will be **ignored... ostracised... criticised... mocked... ridiculed...**
- ...because we live in a **post-Christian, Jesus-hating, confused and sad world... /**
- ...**just as Jesus said we would...!** /
- John 15:18-19
- and we follow the one who was persecuted all the way to the **cross... //**
- we need to be **realistic** - to be **Biblical** – in our thinking about what it means to follow Christ and do mission in a secular world!!
- And **like** Paul... we need to be **tough right back!!**
- Note the way he either goes back to where he just was **beat** up or he heads on **somewhere** else and **keeps going...**
- I too readily **give up** and go **quiet...** put my tail between my **legs** and go in to a **corner...** // but we live in a world which **desperately** needs Jesus – and we must press on in the **strength** of the **Lord... ///**
- Ok – so mission is **tough** – and **we** need to be **tough...** but... secondly, we need to be **flexible** in our approach...

2. FLEXIBLE

- I want us to note that mission in secular world must be **flexible...**
- We'll see this again in Acts 17, but did you notice how Paul's sermon here addressed to **Gentiles** involved in Greek religions, differed **remarkably** to that which he preached to **Jews** in Pisidian Antioch?
- IN Pisidian Antioch – to **Jews** – he started with **Israel** prospering in Egypt and gave a potted history of the **nation** of **Israel...** his **point?** // That the Jesus they rejected is **precisely** the fulfilment of their **own Scriptures.**

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- His audience here now weren't **Jews** – they knew **nothing** of that history and it would be **irrelevant** for them for Paul to speak of it...
- So to **Gentiles** – he starts by pointing out that he has **good news for them...**
- ... encouraging them to turn from the **worthless idols** they **currently** serve – note he's quite **blunt** with them - to *the **living God** who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.*
- Their idols didn't make or create anything – they themselves are indeed **created** things – but the **living God** made **everything there is!**
- And he tells us that this **living God** has left sufficient signs for them to know about him – v17 *he has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy...*
- He doesn't even get to **Jesus** on this occasion, but starting where they're **at**, he urges them to turn from what is **useless**, to the **living God...** from **things**, to the God who made the **things...** and points out that everything they enjoy in this life... rain, crops, food, joy... **has come from God.** //
- central and western NSW - is full of people serving **worthless idols... created things...** instead of their **creator...**
- and they need to know that there is in fact a **creator...** who provides them with everything that's **good** and **right** in their life right **now...**
- and we need to be **flexible** to meet people where they're **at** and take them a little **further** along the way... //
- to the senior **retiree** new to town who has spent their youth in church but hasn't been back since – you can assume a little more **knowledge** and **background...**
- ... but the young **adult** who only ever had a few classes of **RI** if they're lucky – you'll need to start somewhere **else....**
- We must **care** enough about people to work out **where** they are and what they **need...** and have the flexibility to **tailor** our message **accordingly...**
- Are you **ready?**
- Ready to say **something?**
- Ready to **show** people the **futility** of the **gods** which currently **entrap** them?
- ...and to point them to the **living God** who in his **kindness** already **provides** for them in **so many ways...? //**
- So – doing mission in a **secular** age... it's **tough** – we need to be **flexible** – but we need to remember that the work is

3. GOD'S

- So Paul and Barnabas head for **Derbe** – where we're told they won a **large number** of **disciples...** v21
- they return to **Lystra** – **yes** – **where Paul had been stoned!** ...and **Iconium and Antioch...** *strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith.*
- The appoint **elders** in the churches that they visit on their return route...
- ...eventually they arrive back in Antioch from where they were first chosen and sent off and I want you to take careful note of the language used...

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- so look with me at v26- *they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been **committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed***
- do you see that their work was **about** and **how** it is described? /
- They had been committed to the **grace of God**
- Their work was about the **grace** of God from start to finish
- They had a message of **grace**
- ...they were chosen and set apart by **grace**
- ...they were sustained through **persecution** by **grace**...
- ...they were brought safely **home** by **grace**... //
- and when they came to give their **report**... what was their report **about**??
- Have a look with me at v27 *on arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported **all that God had done through them***... or literally 'with' them.
- That's because it's **God's work**...
- ... it remains from **start to finish** – **God's** work!
- God had drawn a Roman **proconsul** to himself and silenced a **sorcerer**; given opportunity for Paul to speak in the **synagogue** where people wanted to hear more and gathered the following week in their **thousands**; God used Paul as the instrument by which many **Gentiles** who were appointed to **eternal life** to **believe** and through God's work, the word of God to spread throughout the whole region; through tribulation he gave Paul and Barnabas opportunity to speak boldly and do miracles and protected them from danger, sending them on to Lystra and Derbe where they continued to preach the good news... God caused many to believe in Derbe and through Paul, appointed elders back in the towns they had first visited... //
- ...yes – God had been at work and they had much to tell not about what **they** had done but about what **God** had done! //
- **Mission** today... spreading the **word** today... sharing Jesus for life - will be **tough**... and we have to rise to be **equal** to the **task**... and **flexible** in the **work**...
- But we have **confidence** as we do so... because it's not **our** work, it's not **our** message and it's not **our** efforts that will win **converts**...
- It's **God's** from start to finish... and in **him** we trust... in **him** we place our **confidence** – and to **him** we look to be at **work**...
- And we humbly **ask him** in his **kindness** – and by his **power** - to **spread** the word of God **HERE**... and draw **many** to **himself**...