

How to do Division
Acts 14:1-7

Intro: EA Revival

- A. Almost exactly 100 years ago, God started a new thing, a big thing, in Uganda (where Nikki and I serve)
- B. The EA Revival

A Ugandan Christian and an English Missionary Doctor met each other, talked for a bit, and agreed to meet together the next day to pray – a few miles from where our church meets.

They continued to pray together daily for something like a week, before the missionary doctor returned to his little hospital far away in Rwanda. Both men felt like God was stirring something in their souls. The Ugandan Christian, filled with joy, quit his high paying job and began sharing about Jesus to anyone who would listen. The doctor went back and started daily bible studies with the hospital staff.

Soon, people in Uganda and Rwanda began to repent of their sins, confessing them publically and weeping with newfound joy and freedom. Not long after some students at the national Bible College in Uganda were moved by the Spirit to meet early every morning for extended prayer and worship. But their meetings were making noise that bothered the sleep of other students and the missionary teachers and faculty. More bothersome, these students began to urge other students and even faculty to repent of their sins and to follow Jesus more strongly.

Soon the whole college was in an uproar, and the head of the college forbid the growing number of students from meeting together. But 26 of them refused to stop meeting, and politely informed the head of the college that the Holy Spirit was compelling them to pray and worship together, and that if they stopped meeting, they would be obeying man and not God. This did not go down well. Wanting to keep discipline at the school, the 26 students were expelled - back then it was a HUGELY consequential decision for them, their families, and even their villages. But most of these 26 went on to become key leaders in what became known as the East Africa Revival.

- a. The EA Revival had HUGE impact in EAfrica+ world
- b. TODAY, universally understood to be a mighty work of God
- c. But at the time, the EA Revival was not welcomed by many people

In fact, it caused a huge amount of controversy and division. Missionaries – upset their sense of superiority: National Clergy – public repentance of sins a step too far, ALMOST divided the church into two opposing camps

We look back, and it seems like HOW COULD YOU NOT SEE THIS? HOW? But the truth is, it's not always easy to see when God is at work, not even when God is doing a BIG THING! In fact, maybe especially easy to miss it when it's a BIG thing, a NEW thing. In real time, it's easy to miss what He is doing, how He is doing it, when He is doing it. So the question for us this morning is: how can we tell when God is moving? In the middle of controversy and division, how do we get it right? How can we see and discern when the Spirit of God is moving in a new and powerful way, maybe a way that we have not seen Him move before? Our passage this morning helps us plot some answers to this question. Turn in your Bibles to Acts 14. As we continue through Acts, we are going slightly out of order and skipping a few verses ahead to Paul and Barnabas' visit to Iconium. Grant is going to finish chapter 13 next week.

Today, we look at 14:1-7. *14:1-7 ¹ Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. ² But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. ³ So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. ⁴ But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. ⁵ When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, ⁶ they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, ⁷ and there they continued to preach the gospel.*

We are right in the middle of the First Missionary Journey. Some background: Commissioned by the Holy Spirit and by the church at Antioch. 2 of the 3 elders who laid hands on Paul and Barnabas and prayed for them and commissioned them seem to have been African. The church at Antioch was the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic congregation, and it was at this church that God starts a new thing, a journey to distant lands to tell people about the Good News of Jesus. They are in the middle of a 2-year missionary journey. Trip outlined – Antioch to Cyprus, Perga, Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe. Beginning of opening of the church for Gentiles. In other words, God is doing a new thing. Not just a new thing in the first missionary journey but opening up the gospel to the Gentiles! This is a BIG thing. You and I would not be here if God has not started this new work!

So, let's look together at our passage, moving through verse by verse. Speaking and Remaining: TOGETHER: *Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed.* The word 'spoke' here is a DIFF Greek word than teaching or peaching.

Ordinary speech: discussing, talking, sharing... So not preaching, but also this speaking in 'such a way' was NOT speaking with natural eloquence or persuasiveness. In fact, Paul writes that people said of him: "in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing." 2 Co 10:10. NIV. So question: are you an unusually gifted/charismatic/powerful speaker? If not, Congrats! Then you can also speak like the Apostle Paul. You are right on track to share good news like he did, to share in a way that people believe.

So, if Paul did not speak with great eloquence or Charisma, then HOW DID he speak? Well certainly he spoke with boldness. Without fear. But there is no other info in this passage about how we can speak 'in such a way' that people believe. But in Colossians, Paul gives us a picture of what 'in such a way' looks like: *6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. (Col 4:6)*

- 'Gracious' - There is that word 'grace' again – our speech is to be flavored by Grace, 'seasoned' with Grace.
- We flavor our speech w/ grace, & we let the Gospel do the rest.

Because the gospel itself has all that we lack! Paul says that *"... my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."* 1 Co 2:4-5. NASB The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God, and when it goes out it will not return empty! TRANSITION: But even as some receive grace, other will resist it. SO REMAINED: *2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. 3 So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.*

God was at work, confirming the word of his grace with signs and wonders. So despite all the opposition, Paul and Barnabas stayed. SIGNS AND WONDERS – miraculous signs, divine wonders. God clearly and supernaturally working in the world. For the 1st missionary journey:

- They brought blindness to a man as a judgement from God
- They brought Divine, direct healing by the hand of God
- Paul was even was raised up to walk away from a stoning, after the crowd left him for dead.

Signs and Wonders – God confirming the apostleship (sent ones) of Paul and Barnabas. (Not just sent out by the elders at Antioch but sent out by God himself.) Our passage this morning asks us a question, one which might be a bit uncomfortable or strange: Why do we not see signs & wonders at EBC? And I can even ask: why not me? Why isn't God granting signs and wonders through my hands, like he did through Paul & Barnabas? I mean, is there something WRONG with me? Caused a lot of anxiety for Christians, even divided a lot of churches! Paul expected signs and wonders from God and even asked us eagerly desire the gifts of the Spirit, including miraculous gifts. Jesus said *'whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these ...'* (Jn 14:12)

I am not persuaded that God has changed his instructions for us. Even today we see signs and wonders done through the hands of Bible-believing, Jesus-loving Christians around the world—especially LAmer, parts of Asia and Africa. But God works in ways we expect Him to work. We see this in Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. The Bible says that Jesus was not able to do any miracles (with a few exceptions) in Nazareth. Why? Because of their unbelief, their lack of faith.

Now, that can be interpreted in dangerous ways in our individualistic culture. We read this story in Matthew 13 and we say 'That person lacked faith' 'If they just had more faith, Jesus would have done a miracle for them.' In other words, if you or I just had more faith, God would do a miracle for us, or thru us. It's about ME – and MY faith. If you don't have your miracle, it is because you lack faith. But nothing could be further from the truth! Because that makes miracles about us, about our faith, our righteousness, our effort! NO! Signs and wonders are of God! HE chooses when to give supernatural gifts, and when not to! God allowed John the Baptist and James the Apostle to be killed in prison. Same God chose to miraculously led Peter & Paul out of prison. Jesus did not perform many miracles in Nazareth because people thought they knew him. This was his hometown; people knew him back when he was growing up, back

when he was helping his dad in the family carpentry business. The town of Nazareth had Jesus figured out! They had him in a box. God has not changed, but we have changed –more specially our CULTURE.

Today we live in a society that has enshrined human reason and science as the way to find truth. And that has a profound impact on how we as Western Christians see God + how we see Him work in world. Because God often chooses to constrain His work to our expectations. So let's NOT put God in a box – constrain him. Be open to God working supernaturally, even do what Paul urges and eagerly desire these gifts! But also know - you are not an inferior Christian if you do not speak in tongues or prophecy or work signs and wonders. Signs and Wonders and supernatural gifts do not make you more spiritual or somehow more in tune with God! Because at the end of the day, signs & wonders are a SIGN, a pointing hand.

We have 3 dogs in Uganda (now less kids, more animals). The most exciting part of the day for these dogs is when they get fed (or if the garbage truck comes by). Most of the time = hang out in front. I feed them at the back. If they're in front, they can't hear it when I fill their bowls w/ food. One time I put food in their bowls, walk to the front, they run up. I point 'Go GET your food!' They get all excited, staring at my hand. Do not obsess about the hand. It exists to point to JESUS. The supernatural gifts exist to point people to Jesus. HE is the REAL wonder. HE is the real supernatural sign of God's favour towards us. HE is the real miracle of God's provision. HE is the real healing that we need. ⁴ *But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles.* You'd think that after supernatural signs & reality bending miracles that everyone would get on board: 'WOAH! They did THAT?! SIGN ME UP!'

But actually, the city stayed and grew even more divided. **Because God's work causes division!** Entire cities divided because of the Gospel. Not just in cities (out there, in the world), but even in churches (believers). The results of this missionary journey brought HUGE, NEW questions to the new church: God seems to be moving among the Gentiles, but can Gentiles really follow the Jewish Messiah?! Divided not just churches, but also the Christian leaders of those churches! Paul commissioned by Antioch on one side, James leading the Jerusalem church on the other! The gospel brings division into cities, churches & leaders, & even families! Matthew 10 ³⁴ *Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.* ³⁵ *For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.* Some in a family will receive Christ, others reject Him – brings division. You start to look at the book of Acts, and you see some much conflict around the early church.

Everywhere the gospel went, division and conflict followed like clockwork. In the middle of controversy and division, how do we see where God is moving? Division is going to happen, so how can we do it well? Today = we get a lesson on **HOW TO DO DIVISION**, 2 do it well. Now, don't worry – I was never good at math, so this def. not what had in mind (no quiz about the Divisor or the Dividend). I have something more simple in mind. Yesterday years old = realize symbol division actual shows div! We'll put our symbol of division up in the corner. I'm not much of a gamer, but in any computer game you have to select some options to set things up for playing the game. First option to choose:

CHOOSE YOUR ALLIES (14:1-2)

Choose Natural Allies or Spiritual Allies - The Jewish people in these pagan cities seem like natural allies. They're fellow countrymen – same culture, language, background. But more importantly, the Jews shared some understanding of God with Christians, unlike the pagan Gentiles. Jews worshiped One God, not all these Greek and Roman gods. They didn't know Jesus, but they already believed in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – Rather than believing in Zeus, Bacchus, and Aphrodite. This is why Paul & Barnabas' normal pattern when sharing the Good News in each town was to go to the Jewish synagogue. So fellow Jews should be the kind of ally that would rally to your side when the chips are down. But in fact, it is because the Jews reject the word of Grace that Paul and Barnabas first turn to the Gentiles, who receive the word w/ Joy. And it was religious Jews from here in Iconium, and in Antioch the town before, who follow Paul and Barnabas to the next town, and stir up the people against them in THOSE towns!

The point is simply this – We should not expect that good, religious people and their leaders will welcome a new, fresh movement of God. People that we might expect to join hands with God, people who look like allies, could very well oppose what God is doing, even persecuting. When God does something new, His allies must be found with spiritual eyes, not natural eyes - because they may not look like what we would expect!

Instead, let's choose Spiritual Allies – Spirit of Jesus + Church of Jesus

The Spirit of Jesus - This new thing that God is doing is overseen by the Holy Spirit. Paul & Barnabas called out, send out, filled by the Holy Spirit. How do we know identify where the Spirit is moving? We look for the fruit of the Spirit, we look for changed lives, you can fake the gifts of the Spirit – fiery preaching & teaching, we probably have all heard of

counterfeit 'healers' who are able to conjure up staged healings and signs and wonders. But you can't fake the fruit of the Spirit, at least not for long. You can't fake changed life, you can't fake the power of the Spirit to bring new life in people.

The Church of Jesus

People who respond to his word of grace. People who are indwelt by the Spirit of Jesus. People from every walk of life, rich and poor, city slicker and country bumpkin, from every tongue, tribe and nation. Problem is, we sometimes have trouble recognizing our allies. Revival in Europe – across Europe, declining church attendance & closing churches. Christians in Europe praying for God to do a new thing, praying for revival. Meanwhile, more and more Africans started moved to Europe. Today, in fact, the biggest churches in Europe are African. European Christians who prayed for revival didn't recognize revival when it came, because it was black. I pray that something similar does not happen here. I don't know what it will look like when God starts a new thing, when he chooses to bring revival to the American church. Revival in America might be brown, I don't know. Revival might have a different political persuasion than we do. Revival might have look more charismatic or more conservative than we are. Let's not put God in a box. AND let's not PUT HIS CHURCH, OUR SPIRITUAL ALLIES, IN A BOX.

CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON (14:3-5) vs 5-6

Human Weapons: the Power of Rulers + Stones of Mobs

Authorities/rulers if you are going to have someone on your side during a fight then you want powerful people by you. We want people in high places so they can help us and protect us. So naturally, we want to choose powerful people as our allies. But look what the Gentile rulers & authorities did! They join in with the religious Jews. These two groups – religious Jews and Gentile rulers and authorities – they make common cause together to fight against what God is doing. They in turn offer protection to a lynch mobs with stones. Whether Secular Rulers or Religious Leaders or Stone-throwing Mobs, all of them are fighting with human weapons. Unfortunately, we are not immune to this as Christians. Spend a tiny bit of time in the Evangelical corner of Twitter (or X, I guess I should say) and you will certainly see Christians acting like a mob.

But I think especially these last years, I have seen a lot of Christians using rulers and authorities as weapons, using political power to try and win spiritual battles. Election season is fast approaching: 'This election is the most important one ever. If we don't elect this one or that one, America will be lost forever'. The LORD deposes kings and raises up rulers, the LORD enlarges the nations, and leads them away. And yet, today even churches are sorting by political parties! Entire churches filled with Christians take their battle plans NOT from the Lamb of God, but from the Donkey of the Democrats or the Elephant of the Republicans.

Friends, GOD FORBID! I PRAY people will see you for what you are - Grace-filled Christian - long before they would ever identify you as a Political Partisan! Instead, **we must chose Divine Weapons**

³ *For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does.* ⁴ *The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.*

A lot I could say here, but just want to keep it to two things from our passage and the first missionary journey. Fasting & Prayer. Weapons that African Allies know how to use. Word of His grace. A grace-filled answer to those in an LGBTQ lifestyle. A word of grace to those with broken relationships in their family. A word of grace through your presence with a lonely neighbor or coworker – an epidemic in America.

CHOOSE YOUR CHARACTER (14:6-7, see also 13:51-52)

Fear & Anger (losing \$, prestige & influence), vs. what motivated the religious Jews and the Gentile leaders to come together? They each had something to lose – In some cases, they were losing money. In almost every case, they were afraid of losing their position of influence and their prestige. Reacted in Fear and Anger. **Perseverance & Joy** in the Holy Spirit. Vs. 6-7 Doesn't look like perseverance! (meaning of 'fled' to Lystra and Derbe). ²³ *When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next ...* (Mt 10:23). Shake the dust off your feet and move on, Jesus said. So these guys are not running away, they are obeying the instructions of Jesus. At the end of our passage about their stay in Iconium, they head out to the next town because of the persecution. But in the beginning they stayed and preached a long time, despite the persecution!

HOW DO WE KNOW WHEN TO STAY, AND WHEN TO GO? When is the time to persevere, when is the time to shake the dust off your feet? Ask for Wisdom, God gives generously. Fast & Pray. Seeking wise council of godly Christians, you don't have to make these decisions alone. Either way, our reaction to persecution is to persevere, sharing the word of his grace, and JOY knowing that trials are a testing of our faith. JOY is exactly how Paul and Barnabas reacted. At the city before Iconium, the 'devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city' stirred up

persecution against them and drove them out of the city. They shook the dust off their feet. Ac 13:52 ⁵² *And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.*

The Gospel of division in divided America. To be completely honest, I come across more anxiety and fear than I do JOY, as I have travelled and visited with people across America. It is not hard to understand why. Because the changes happening in America are unprecedented. For 200 years, the Evangelical, Christian faith has really been at the heart of American life. And the church enjoyed greater influence and frankly power than just about anywhere else in the world. But those days are over. I don't know what the future will bring. Revival? Persecution? Both? But even if God does something NEW, something BIG, I doubt very much that God is going to take the church back to where she used to be, back to the days when the church influences American society from the center. BUT, this actually gives me great optimism for the church here in America. This world is not our home. America is not our home. We are aliens and strangers in this land. Jesus told us "If they hate me they will hate you."

¹⁰ *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.*

Our whole passage today really points to JESUS. Jesus spoke with boldness, through the Spirit, about the Kingdom of God and the word of his of grace.

And he suffered opposition and persecution. In fact, an unholy union of religious Jews and Gentile rulers plotted together and, with the help of an angry mob, they killed him by hanging him on a cross. But the Father confirmed the truth of Jesus' message by supernaturally raising Him up to life on the third day. Jesus did not just share the word of His grace, He WAS and IS the Word of His grace. When Jesus moves, division follows. But how we divide matters. I think our math lesson today has shown us that there are really 2 kinds of Division in the world. The most common division is a division which results in subtraction. It takes, it breaks down, it takes a whole and leaves fragments everywhere.

But then there is the division caused by the Gospel of Jesus. Jesus came, he warned us, to divide a man against his father. But his bigger purpose in the midst of that was to reconcile us all to our heavenly father. Jesus came, he warned us, not to bring peace but a sword. But his bigger purpose is that someday He is going to gather up our swords and beat them into plowshares. And 'nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.' (Is 2:4) The division the Jesus practiced, in other words, is a division that results in multiplication. It's a division that grows the Kingdom of God, that brings the word of Grace to new frontiers, where some will accept and some fight against the gift of His grace.

PRAY

- Thank you for giving us grace,
- Thank you for entrusting us as ambassadors of the word of your grace.
- Holy Spirit, fill us with the JOY of your salvation
- Give us wisdom & power to share your grace in a way that multiplies your kingdom.

Acts 14:1-7 – Sermon for EBC 3 Sept 2023

¹ Now at Iconium ^athey entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. ² ^bBut the ^cunbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against ^dthe brothers.¹ ³ So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for ^ethe Lord, who bore witness to ^fthe word of his grace, ^ggranting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. ⁴ But the people of the city ^hwere divided; ⁱsome sided with the

^a See ch. 13:5

^b See ch. 13:50

^c ch. 19:9; John 3:36; Rom. 15:31

^d See John 21:23

¹ Or *brothers and sisters*

^e ch. 15:8; Heb. 2:4; [Mark 16:20]

^f ch. 20:32

^g ch. 4:29, 30

^h [ch. 23:7]

ⁱ [ch. 17:4, 5; 19:9; 28:24]

09-03-23

John Tuggy

Jews and some with the apostles. ⁵When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, ^jto mistreat them and ^kto stone them, ⁶they learned of it and ^lfled to ^mLystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, ⁷and there they continued to preach the gospel. ^(ESV)

Sermon Title: How to do Division

Main Idea: The Gospel of Jesus divides cities, families, and even churches. But the ways we divide matters: we need to align ourselves with spiritual allies, fight with supernatural weapons, and cultivate winning character. In a divided America, how we do division will either multiply or subtract from the word of His grace we bring to our neighbors.

^j 1 Thess. 2:2; [2 Cor. 12:10]

^k [ver. 19]

^l See Matt. 10:23

^m 2 Tim. 3:11

How to do Division
Acts 14:1-7

- I. The East Africa Revival

- II. Iconium & the 1st missionary journey

- III. Speaking & remaining (v. 1-3)

- IV. Signs & wonders (v. 3)

- V. How to do division (v. 4)
 1. Choose your allies (v. 14:1-2)

 2. Choose your weapons (v. 14:3-5)

 3. Choose your character (v. 14:6-7 + 13:51-52)

- VI. The Gospel of division in divided America