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**Gathers Around God's Goodness,  
Not Man's Approval  
Acts Chapter 14**

Chapter Fourteen. You realize as you go through Scripture that it is such a contemporary text. The word of God is very much a part of our lives today. How appropriate it is that we are looking at Chapter Fourteen at this time in our nation. We are involved in a realm in which people are attempting to not only rationalize their erroneous positions which are often even wicked and nefarious; but they are trying to glorify them. They are trying to call upon the church to not only be tolerant, but to celebrate them. What we are seeing is a strange phenomenon: the church is bowing to the demands of the world and pursuing what seems to me as more the venue of looking good or looking nice rather than the venue of following Christ and being

holy. We believe that the only way that you can be kind, the only way that you can show the goodness of God, is to follow Christ. We do not believe that there is any other way. Unfortunately, the world is trying to tell us that it is about being nice. It is about being kind. They believe that these are what brings people to our Savior. That is not true. We will be looking at Acts Chapter Fourteen. As I go through these chapters and give you a title, I must say that I do quite a bit of wrestling, even though the titles themselves appear very simple. I personally feel that the simpler you can make the title, the more you struggle with it because you have to bring in all these thoughts and then convey them in a simple way, a way that makes it very clear. It causes me to wrestle.

As we look at Chapter Fourteen, the church is gathering around God's goodness, clearly not man's approval. This is what the church is about. What we are doing is defining what the church is about. As we go through the

Book of Acts, we see the foundation of the church being built. What God is doing is taking us into different realms or different scenarios where we can see how this doctrine plays out. When we look at the doctrine and the establishment of the church, the truth of the church, how do they follow Christ in real-life situations? What does it look like? In the Book of Acts, we begin to see how God uses the acts of the apostles or the business of the apostles to lay the foundation in the real world. Scripture is not written in a vacuum. Scripture is actually written in history. Therefore, we visit places like Lystra and Iconium and Antioch, real places where real things were happening as they come in contact with real people.

As we pick up in Chapter Fourteen of the Book of Acts, we come to a region where Paul enters a Jewish synagogue. Up to this point, he has been able to go into synagogues in the regions he has visited. But the further away he gets from Jerusalem, the fewer

synagogues there are. As we begin Chapter Fourteen, he will now go into a place where there are no synagogues. Therefore, the synagogue will not be the jumping-off point from which he begins ministry. The reason I state that is because God is the One who chooses the venue, and God is the One who chooses how the minister will convey the truth in each setting. We often think in terms of a cookie-cutter mentality where we try to develop a certain method of sharing God with people. Then we try to use it in all kinds of situations. What we see in the Book of Acts is that this is not the way it is handled at all. It is the Spirit of God who moves in the hearts of men. God is the One who opens up the venues by which we are to begin to minister. That is to say that, when Paul is in a region where there are a lot of Jews, the first thing he will do is to go to the synagogue. That will be the place; and then he will open up the word of God. We have seen this pattern already. Looking back in Chapter 13, he visited Paphos, Pergamon, and Pamphylia.

(Acts 13:14) “But going on from Perga, they came to Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day went into the synagogue and sat down.”

(Acts 13:15) “After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them saying, ‘Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.’”

He is adhering to the tradition of the Jews in this town because it is well populated by Jews with an established synagogue. This is his jumping-off point. He uses the Scriptures that lead to Christ, so it is a jumping-off point from which he begins his declaration of Christ. It is interesting that he pursues the proclamation of the Gospel through the venue of the synagogue. Why? The synagogue is a place where the Jews have already established the righteousness of God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is the place God ordained for worship. It is also worth noting that you will not see Paul actively doing any kind of

miracles. You might say that Paul decided not to. But no. God decided not to let Paul. The point is that God will empower Paul to perform miracles in certain situations but not in other situations. There are churches that host healing services at certain times. How do they know when the Spirit wants to heal? Has the Spirit of God told you that, for instance, at 07:00 He will be present for a healing service? God works in different areas in different ways. When Paul is in a realm of Jews, it will be through the Law that he will begin to minister. As he begins to read in verse 16, Paul stands up. Why does Paul stand up? Because he is a rabbi. Paul is a member of the Sanhedrin. He has the authority to do this. If some of you were to stand up in a synagogue, they will “tell you to sit down.” But Paul has the authority to do this. Therefore, God uses the authority that God had given him for the purpose of establishing his approach to the Jews. Paul understands that there is an order to the way things are done. So he stands up and addresses them as “Men of

Israel.” To whom is he talking? He is not talking to Gentiles. He is talking to those who profess to fear God, the God of Israel, the God who chose their fathers. He goes into a dissertation in which he begins to talk about not only Moses and Egypt, but Samuel and David--very familiar characters to these people. When we come into Chapter 14, his first stop is Iconium where he goes to the Jewish synagogue. He teaches there. After that, he goes into towns which have no Jewish synagogue. We wonder how in the world God is going to open the door there? God begins a magnificent, miraculous healing work among the people in the towns that do not have the Jewish synagogue. Yet, not in all of them. He uses miracles in the regions that are very superstitious. Where there is a lot of superstition, God will provide great works of miracles to get their attention. Even so, you will never see an ongoing ministry of miraculous works. It will always be an establishing ministry for the purpose of opening up the word of God. It will only be used as a

door to establish the foundation of the word of God because it is the word of God that is always superior. If you do not know that to be true, once again, let us reiterate this.

(Hebrews 2:1) “For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.”

(Hebrews 2:2) “For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty,”

(Hebrews 2:3) “how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard,”

Paul is actually telling us that there is a greater word than the Law of the Old Testament.

(Hebrews 2:4) “God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.”

What was He bearing witness to with the works of the miracles? The word of God. The Gospel of God. This is no different than Moses parting the waters performing great miracles against the great pharaoh. Why is God establishing all these miracles? Because He is about to introduce the Law of God. The Law of God is superior. The works of miracles are like a trumpet in that they announce something in a way that gets all of our attention. Now we are listening. Now God will tell us what is important. We know that on this earth our outer man is decaying. It does not matter how many times you are healed on the earth, you are still going to die. This body is dying. Ultimate healing is going home (to heaven). So the purpose of the healing in these places where people were not deep thinkers nor in the word of God is to get their attention. We will see this in Acts

Chapter 14 as it starts off. In Iconium, Paul first goes to the synagogue. Shortly after that, the Jews begin to reject his message. We will pick start with verse 1.

(Acts 14:1) “In Iconium, they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and of Greeks.”

(Acts 14:2) “But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren.”

(Acts 14:3) “Therefore, they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands.”

Why were the signs and the wonders done by their hands? The text says right there. What was he doing? He was bearing witness or testifying to the word of God’s grace. Why was that necessary? Because they were now out of the synagogue. The people of the

synagogue had been stirring up many against them, and now God was going to open another door by which people would listen. He begins to do this in a very superstitious region. There will be another place where Paul does this which is in Ephesus. Here again, Paul is not sitting around planning a healing service. Paul has no idea when these things will happen. The reason that God does it that way is, once again, for the purpose of establishing the word of God. It is not for the purpose of drawing attention to the miracles. Do you remember how miracles are described? By signs and wonders and miracles. Hear that first word again. Signs. What does a sign do? It points to something. Signs do not point to themselves. The purpose is to point to the word of God, which is what will bring the greatest healing miracle. As you go into Acts Chapter 19, Paul goes to Ephesus, a very, very, very superstitious place. As Paul begins to move around, people are walking under his shadow and being healed. That is all it says. People are coming near them, and they are being healed. What do you

think happens? In Acts Chapter 19 it talks about that happening. The very next thing is they start burning all their magic books. You see all this superstition going away. Once this happens, Paul will no longer continue to do miracles in Ephesus. In fact, who does Paul set up and establish in Ephesus but Timothy? We know nothing flamboyant about Timothy. But what we do know is that the church has now been established; and the announcement has been made that God's word is powerful enough to change everything. That is the purpose of it. He no longer goes into synagogues. The only thing the Jews now need is proof that whatever is being said aligns with the Old Testament. From this point, he no longer ministers to the Jews; but he travels to the Gentiles, more specifically to those who are superstitious.

When Paul goes to Corinth, there are no miracles at all. In fact, when he goes to Corinth, he does not have any money, so he works making tents. Why does God do

that? Because the Corinthians love money and power and position. God was not allowing him to come using the venue of power and money and position. In fact, Paul will say in Second Corinthians Chapters 11 and 12, “When I came to you, I came to you in weakness and with no strength. I did not even have any money so that you might not trust in the wisdom of man.” Even his speech was contemptible to them. Paul could not rely upon those things. In every case, you see how God transforms the way the message is proclaimed.

Throughout, the whole purpose is the Word of God; it is to elevate God; it is not to elevate man. How easily it happens, no matter what man does, that people want to almost immediately elevate man. That is what we will be reading in Acts Chapter 14.

(Acts 14:4) “But the people of the city were divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles.”

This seems strange to me. If you saw wonders and signs and miracles, would you side with somebody else? Why the division? Why is there division? Not only will there be a division, but the majority will turn against Paul. There is something very important that you need to understand; the majority will turn against Paul though all that he has done is good. Is that not what Jesus did? Did He do that which was good? We have the thought that if we are good to people, if we give them things, if we are kind to them, it will change them. It will change them all right. They will come after you. Are you asking me to make sense of it? It simply does not make any sense. It makes absolutely no sense. In Orlando (a city nearby), there is a celebration of people who have been living in debauchery. In that celebration, the whole nation is saying, "This is a wonderful thing." The very people who are living in debauchery are holding hands with the Muslims who hate them so much. Does that make any sense to you? The Christians, the believers who would willingly

accept them and proclaim the name of Jesus Christ, say, “They are enemies. That does not make any sense.” The thought is that if we are kind and go to their outings and sing “Kumbaya” with them, then maybe they will love us. But it does not work that way! Do you know why that is true? Because they love their sin, and they are not going to let go of that sin. What happens when Paul and Barnabus leave the area?

(Acts 13:51) “But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium.”

That is not a kind thing to do. Why do they do that? Because of what the church should be about. This is a key point. If a person does not receive the Gospel, he will not change. There is nothing more powerful than the Gospel.

(Romans 1:16) “For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”

We believe that the Gospel is the power of God, and that power is what changes people. We do not believe that we change people, but we do believe that the goodness of God changes people. The church does not gather around the goodness of man. We do not cater to what man thinks, but we gather to worship and glorify God's goodness. If man is not going to accept the goodness of God, there is no goodness that is going to be good enough for him to accept. There are many passages that give this fundamental principle, but if you look in

(Isaiah 26:10) “Though the wicked is shown favor, he does not learn righteousness; he deals unjustly in the land of uprightness and does not perceive the majesty of the Lord.”

He will not change. What does it say? “He does not learn righteousness. He deals unjustly in the land of uprightness and does not perceive the majesty of the Lord.” Why? Because he is wicked. What does wicked

mean? It means that he does not want anything to do with God. That is what wicked means. He does not want to have anything to do with God. We see Jeremiah crying out to God in

(Jeremiah 18:10) “if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will think better of the good with which I had promised to bless it.”

It is almost as though He is asking a question. Should they give evil when I give them good? Should they be mean? It is not supposed to work that way. You think that if you are nice to them, then they will be nice to you. Right? And God says, “No. Not the way it works. In Psalms Chapter 35:12, the psalmist is crying out, “They have given me evil for good.” Why would that be true? He also says, “They are waiting for me to die.” In Acts Chapter 14, what we see is that the city is divided. Some sided with the Jews, some with the apostles.

(Acts 14:5) “And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them,”

The Jews had been so, I would say, powerful in their ways of persuasion that they literally persuaded the Gentiles as well.

(Acts 14:6) “they became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra, and Derbe, and the surrounding region;”

Lycaonia, Lystra, and Derby are a region which is basically where present-day Turkey is. On the map of that day, it would be in Asia Minor or a little bit more toward the Galatian region and Phrygia. In that region, the people were very, very superstitious. We know this not only by historical books but by the very names that they have. In fact, in the text, they will start crying out in a Lycaonian language. Probably most of you are familiar with the term lycon or wolf man. There was a wolf place which was part of their worship. God opens

up a door for Paul to minister to these people by doing good. Instead of turning to God, however, they begin to worship Paul and Barnabas. It is the natural phenomenon of man. If you do enough good work and focus on the good work, before long people will either worship you or they will worship the good work that you do. However, they will not worship Christ. The church focuses only on the Gospel of Christ. Yes, there are times when we open our doors to do something good. We announce the coming of God's goodness through a gracious act, but that is all it is. It is not a continual act in the sense that we do not continue to do those things in order to keep the people in the Kingdom. If you are doing that to keep them in the Kingdom, before long they will fall in love with your wonderful goodness. That is a terrible thing as we will see in this passage. Paul and Barnabas go, "Do not worship us." Unfortunately, I am not seeing much of that response from Christian leaders happening today. Paul and Barnabas become very upset. You might almost feel like saying, "Wait a

minute, Paul and Barnabas, you are closing the door. This is an opportunity of a lifetime. At least, they are listening to you. Now that they think you are gods, we can use that.” You know? How can it be used? Okay. Let's say, Zeus and Hermes are hosting a grand opening tonight where they will introduce God. It makes a lot of sense to me.” Unfortunately, this is a pursuit of man. Immediately they will turn against us.

(Acts 14:7) ”and there they continued to preach the gospel.”

They fled and did what? They continued to preach the Gospel. Preach the Gospel. That is where the power is.

(Acts 14:8) “At Lystra, a man was sitting who had no strength in his feet, lame from his mother's womb, who had never walked.”

Why is the focus on this man?

(Acts 14:9) “This man was listening to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze on him and had seen that he had faith to be made well,”

He was listening to Paul. The text infers that he was listening intently. We have someone with a depth of longing. He had faith already.

(Acts 14:10) “said with a loud voice, ‘Stand upright on your feet’ And he leaped up and began to walk.”

(Acts 14:11) “When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, ‘The gods have become like men and have come down to us.’”

I am going to call the Lycaonian language wolf-land language. From what we know historically, an ancient historian described them as a wild and lawless race. You can visualize the man dancing in the street, and how wonderful this was. They surmised that the gods had taken on the form of a man.

(Acts 14:12) “And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.”

The people actually named them. They called Barnabas, Zeus, who was the king of the gods. They called Paul, Hermes, who was the messenger god. Another name would be Mercury from the Roman standpoint. This might infer that Barnabas was older because Zeus would have been the father. Hermes was his son. Probably Paul looked younger than Barnabas. Because Paul was the chief speaker, he was given the name of the messenger god.

(Acts 14:13) “The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.”

That makes a lot of sense to me. What do you feed wolves? The sacrifices were probably cultural. This is what they do. Right? We do not want to offend their culture. This is part of the way they celebrate. This is

their way of saying thank you. Do you understand how subtle this is?

(Acts 14:14) “But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out”

This seems to be a strange reaction for somebody when they could easily have the opportunity to talk about God through an easier venue. But they choose not to. They begin to cry out and say, “Men, what are you doing? You cannot do this.” In doing so, they are beginning to criticize the culture. One thing that a foreigner does not want to do is to criticize culture if they want good relations. But let me tell you something. You should criticize culture when culture goes against God. Do not be shy to criticize culture. There are good elements of any culture, and there are bad elements. How do you know? If it aligns with God, it is good culture. If there is a culture to be honorable

and to be kind, that is a good one. But if there is a culture to worship other gods, that is a terrible one.

(Acts 14:15) “and saying, “Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.”

We have the same pastures. We have the same feelings. We are people. Why are you pointing to us? We have come here to preach the Gospel. There is Paul’s emphasis again. Right? That is what this is all about. He calls their cultural way of worship “vain things.” The best way to describe that would be anything empty, useless, or powerless. It is a stupid thing to do. Let go of your stupid junk would be another way to it. Not too politically correct. Let go of these vain things and serve the living God who made the heaven and the earth. “In the generations gone by, God has

been gracious to you and left you alone,” would probably be the way that it reads in the Greek. He left you alone. He allowed you to go your own way. Yet in that, He was kind to you. Now here again, the emphasis of the church is always the goodness of God. What is the Gospel? Good news. From whom? God. If it is not from God, it is not the Good news. I do not control any good news. I could tell you the sun will come out tomorrow, but I do not control the sun. So where does the Good news come from? It only comes from God. Every good and perfect gift comes from God for God so loved the world. That is good news that He gave His only begotten Son. It is the goodness of God. Has God been displaying His goodness in other things? Absolutely! All of creation is communicating God's goodness. All of creation shouts that God is good. (Acts 14:17) “and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from

heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.”

It is as though He is quoting from Jeremiah 4:24. What Paul is trying to say is that any good, any happiness, any joy, any benefit that you have been given has been from God. So why are you worshiping these vain things that are purposeless? They have no power. They are useless in your life. Why are you doing this?

(Acts 14:18) “Even saying these things, with difficulty they restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them.”

At what point would you say, “Oh, that is not going to work. They are not listening to us. They want to invite us out for dinner. I guess we will have to go. These guys are not going to leave.” With great labor, they restrain the people and kept them from sacrificing. I wonder how many times they had to keep requesting the people to not make the sacrifice? You think at this juncture that

not only are the people getting the message but that everything will be fine. However, that is not true.

(Acts 14:19) “But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing them to be dead.”

Lo and behold, the people whom they had offended from Antioch and Iconium now come. I am saying that the Jews specifically are now coming to get him.

Another way of translating “supposing him to be dead” would be deeming him to be dead or considering him to be dead or holding him to be dead. Why? Because they stoned him to death. Why is Scripture saying that they deemed him dead? Because God did not deem him dead. It may have been the end from their perspective. Physically it was the end, but not with God. God will raise him up. In fact, the word that is used in the next verses mean that he was raised up. So, was he dead? Yes. I believe he was dead. He was

deemed dead. Not by God, but by man. Not only was Paul raised up, but the next day he goes on as if nothing happened. If a person is stoned, rocks are hitting him. Things are banging on his head, his face, and his body to the point where he is not breathing anymore. He will not be skiing tomorrow. It would have to be a miraculous event for somebody to be raised from the dead to the degree that tomorrow he is able to go on as though everything is okay.

(Acts 14:20) “But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe.”

He got up and entered the city. The disciples probably urged him to get out of there. But no, he goes back into the city. This guy obviously had too many rocks hit him. He enters the city. Not until the next day did he leave with Barnabas for Derbe. What did he do there?

(Acts 14:21) “After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,”

What did he do there? We keep hearing that. I wonder if that is important. He preached the Gospel and made many disciples. What is the purpose of the church? Right! It is **not** a healing institution. It is **not** a social institution. What we are to do is to proclaim the Gospel. We know if that person receives the Gospel, everything will ultimately be okay. I have yet to find a person who receives the Gospel and then truly follows the Lord who is not okay. They become God's child and they are now in His hands. Even if they have to suffer He will be with them. I can tell you that if they do not receive the Gospel, I do not care what you do for them, they are not going to be okay. They are not going to be okay. This is why the Psalmist says,

(Psalm 37:25) “I have been young and now I am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his descendants begging bread.”

What does he mean by that? God takes care of His own. He does not abandon His children. What is the best thing you can do for somebody? Point them to God. Or as Paul would say,

(II Corinthians 5:20) “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”

Be reconciled to God. That is what we are trying to do. That is what the church does. After he preached the Gospel and made many disciples in Derbe, he returned to Iconium and Antioch. That is where all the problems were. Why do you think he does that? Because establishing the church and leaders within that church and encouraging its disciples are more important than his comfort or even his life. And you begin to realize

that following Christ has nothing to do with the convenience of the day or of even reaping great things from this world. In fact, to me what is interesting is that it will be from this realm, that is to say the realm of great oppression, great difficulty, and great hardship, that God will raise up elders for the church. The timing is not a mistake. What Scripture is telling us is that you will never find good elders in a time when everything is going well. You will find them when everything is going badly because then they are strong. What you are looking for are people who are following God. Why? Because they get stuff from him? Because they are healed? Because God will use that to open the door for the superstitious people? No. The ones whom God calls to lead are those who follow Him unto death no matter what happens. Paul goes back to these places where they have experienced hostility.

(Acts 14:22) “strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying,

‘Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.’”

Strengthening literally means to make them firm and to establish the disciples. He encouraged them to continue remain in the faith. That is the conviction of what they know to be true about Jesus. Right?

(Acts 14:23) “When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”

You see under what circumstances they appoint the elders. We believe as a church that God is good, and what we see is that man is capricious, undependable, and very hateful. God is the good one. I know that the world wants to say something terrible happened. Why did God do that? How terrible is that? What we need to ask is who had his finger on the gun? It was not God who did the shooting. It was the hostility of man. Yet man will turn things around and make God look like the

enemy. By doing so, he makes himself look better. It is all about elevating man. Why would you trust man? Paul continuously reiterates God's goodness. He is the one who causes the rain to fall. He is the one who brings the good things into your life. "Turn to God." "I do not want to turn to God, but I would like to have you over dinner." "I am not coming over for dinner. I am not. If you are not going to receive my Lord and Savior, I have nothing more to say. Nothing that I can do will be good enough to change your heart. There is nothing that I can do. You have rejected the truth of the Gospel, and everything is about the Gospel." Paul does not go back, however, to Lycaonia. I want you to note this, Paul does not go back into its towns and set up a soup kitchen in order to bring in the Lycaonian people. He does not do that, does he? What does he focus on? The people who are devout through their hardship. Where are they in Lycaonia? This is why Paul says,

(II Timothy 2:2) “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witness, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

What do you look for? Where do you spend your time? You look for those who love Christ, and you spend time with them. What do you mean, love Christ? People who love Him no matter what happens. Whether they are getting something or are not getting something.

Whether they are bribed into it or not bribed into it.

They love Jesus, and they are disciples of Christ. That is where Paul spends his time. This is where he establishes a church and appoints elders.

(Acts 14:23) “When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”

They actually put them into the hands of God and of the Lord in whom they had put all of their trust and belief.

(Acts 14:24) “They passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia.”

(Acts 14:25) “When they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.”

Here again, the emphasis is what? The word of God.

(Acts 14:26) “From there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished.”

It is God's graciousness to us. Look at the word accomplished. It was done. “Paul, do you think you need to go back? There are a lot of people who did not receive you.” “No, we got it done.” “What do you mean you got it done?” “We established the church for those who would be faithful to the Gospel. It is done and time to move on.” How powerful is that? “Do you not think that we need to do more?” No. Find the ones who are faithful and have received the wonderful good news that God is good. “Will others come?” We trust they will. They have a source now. They have the church,

and all they have to do is come to hear the word of God.” “What about miracles? Should we not have to stimulate those?” “No. Already we have established the Gospel by God’s authority. We know that the Gospel is authoritative. From now on, people will come to hear the word. Let's make this practical. Easter arrives. We are celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Absolutely. “There is no reason to invite an unbeliever because he will not be celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” “But there is. That is why we invite him.” Do we invite them? Do we invite them to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ? We do not invite them to color eggs with us. I want to invite them to hear the word, but I am not going to placate them. I am not going to lure them in. I am not going to color Easter eggs with them so they will come. That is not why they are here. Should the reason to invite them to dinner for Father's Day be the hope that they will listen to the Gospel? Look. If you want to invite them to dinner, fine. But I think it cheapens the Gospel when we put all

those lures out there. When I say “we”, I am talking about the church. When the church begins to use lures, what the church is saying is that we do not believe in the power of the Gospel. We do not believe the Gospel is powerful enough to reach people. Now I know that people want to tag on that the Gospel is doing nice things. No. That is not true. The Gospel is that Jesus did a nice thing for you by dying for you. That is the nice thing He did.

(Romans 2:4) “Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?”

What is the kindness of God?

(John 3:16) “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

How will I demonstrate the kindness of God? I will tell the person how much God loves him. He loved him so much that He died on the cross for him. Would you

invite someone to see the love of Christ being played out in the serenity of your family? What is the greatest way you can love your family? Love them as Jesus does. If you invite someone to have a meal, then let them know that we have gathered together today to hear the Gospel. I am glad you came. If you are gathering together to play video games and do other stupid stuff, then no. Do not do it. If you think that because you are so wonderful or because they like being around you that this is going to bring him to Jesus, forget it. It is the Gospel that changes a person. Now should you be mean? No. Do not go around kicking people in the knee and then ask them to receive Jesus. What we are talking about is the source of power. Where is it? The power is in the message. This is why Paul says,

(I Corinthians 1:18) “For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

I know that this is foolishness to the world. I know that they perceive it as stupid. If you were to go where people are saddened over the death of loved ones and begin to proclaim that Christ loves them and died on the cross for their sins, they would laugh at you. I am not saying you should not do it. I am saying to expect ridicule. I would trust that they would not. I do not want to prophesy to that degree, but when you look at their anger, they are angry with the wrong people. What is that telling you? That they love their sin. If you begin saying, “You know what? You need to repent and ask Jesus Christ to be your Lord and Savior. He loves you. He will save you. He will redeem you.” “Are you saying I am a sinner?” “Yes. I am saying you are a sinner. I am saying I am a sinner. I am saying all God's children were sinners at one time. But we came to Jesus Christ, and He forgave us. That is the good news.” Unfortunately, man has his own agenda. You see in the passage how quickly things change where Paul visits. Scripture is specifically doing this to show the capriciousness of

the world. Paul is also showing how God chooses certain ones, and how they cannot be chased away. If most people were to see someone stoned to death who then comes back to life and returns to visit the town, they would be shocked. Any volunteers to do this? Who in his right mind would do this? But Paul has disciples who need him. Quite probably Timothy was one of those disciples because he was from the area of Lystra. He might actually have seen Paul die. What an amazing testimony to the Gospel which is so powerful that it could change a heart and make them instantly ready to die for the Savior. I have seen and heard such testimony. I have seen it in the lives of people where, almost minutes after they receive the Lord, they are called upon to give their life. How could that be? How could that fortitude be without a power that goes far beyond our convenience and everything else.

(Acts 14:27) “When they arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that

God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.”

This is the church that gathers around God's goodness. They glorified God. Great things He had done. The church never boasts in its own goodness. I will not boast in anything but Christ. I hear much boasting by men. But we believe in God's goodness. We gather together to celebrate God's goodness.

Is Pastor Gary good? No. Pastor Gary is not good. Ask my wife. I am not good, but I can tell you this. God can change a heart. God can take a person like me who is very selfish and very focused on my desires; and He can cause me to love people. Talk about a miracle! That is transforming, and God is that powerful. It is His Gospel that did that for me. It was not anything that I did. I can tell you this. You could not have bribed me into this kingdom. My brother was pretty good at standing in front of people. By the age of two, he was reciting the Christmas story in front of the church

verbatim. If anyone were to ask me to talk, it would not happen. I had nothing to say. I remember my parents asking me if I wanted to sing? No. What if we take you out to Dairy Queen? No. What if we take you to a movie? No. You want to sit in your room? Fine with me. I am not going to stand in front of people. But I can tell you this. God changed me that much. That is how powerful I believe this Gospel is. You and I must trust in the power of the Gospel and quit relying upon man's ability to try to change people. It never sticks. I have never talked people into believing. I have never seen it stick. I can try to argue people into believing, but it never sticks. I can tell you this. When I see God call somebody who begins to come, I cannot talk them out of it. Jesus turns to His disciples and says,

(Luke 9:23) “And He was saying to them all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.’”

You have to take up your cross. You have to follow Him.

(John 6:67) “So Jesus said to the twelve, ‘You do not want to go away also, do you?’”

(John 6:68) “Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.’”

(John 11:16) “Therefore, Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us also go, so that we may die with Him.’”

These guys know what they are in for. That is how powerful our Gospel is. Do not be afraid to present the Gospel. It is the only power. That is what these disciples are doing. If in fact there is a moment when they are performing great miracles, it is only God providing a door through which they can present the Gospel. That is all it is, and that is what they are celebrating. God has provided doors. We all know that the Gospel is supreme. How do you discern between your wisdom and God opening the door when you proclaim that someone should follow Christ? If you see someone who has bad habits that you used to have

and he invites you over for dinner, is that a door to preach the Gospel or not?

(I Corinthians 15:33) “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals.’”

How do you decide between the two? The argument often is that Jesus sat down and ate with sinners. The answer that I always give to that is, “Yes. But Jesus was leading the conversation. He was the one who was in charge of the conversation. Jesus will always be at the forefront of the conversation.” I would say this, “If you can go to a place and control the conversation in a way that is pleasing and honoring to the Lord, then go. But if you are sitting in that conversation and these people are talking about all kinds of nasty things, you and I know where that conversation will go. It sometimes starts off with tearing down others.” I am not going to sit around a table where people are tearing down others. Scripture says that you become one who practices with them. And it says have nothing to do with these people.

(I Corinthians 6:18) “Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.”

(II Corinthians 6:17) “Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate.”

So where do I witness, and where do I testify? Where is witnessing allowed? It is like a friend I had from school. He asked if we could sit down and have some time together. I said that was fine with me and asked, “Where do you want to study the Bible?” He replied that he did not know if he wanted to. I suggested that he let me know when he might. I was glad to come to him. I make that clear to people prior to our spending time together. If you know that the person has a tendency to acrimony or talking about bad things or attacking others, if you know that to be true and that they are not going to listen to you, do not go. I have had relatives call me up and say something like this. “We would like for you to come over. We do not want you

talking about God.” My response is, “Okay. I probably will not be there.” You realize that if they do not want you to talk about the things that you feel are important, there is no point in going. If you feel like it is an opportunity in which you can minister, then I would say go. What if I took them out of their environment and pull them into my environment? It is always better there because you can control the conversation better.

(Joshua 24:15) “If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

If they do not like it, they can leave. We believe that which transforms people is not us. As wonderful as my cooking is (know that I am not a good cook), inviting people to share a meal is not going to change a person. They will get full and then will regurgitate on you. Men

are hostile. Some think we will lead others to Christ by our kindness. No. It is the kindness of God that leads men to repentance. The kindness of God is the Gospel. What we proclaim as a church is God's goodness. If people are not listening to God's goodness, they are not going to listen to anything. I know that I have repeated that several times. I do not want to be overly redundant, but I am seeing so much political garbage that is sickening me. It is their way of manipulating the church. They do not want us to talk about Jesus. They want us to be nice. Stop it. There is no nice aside from Jesus. I am not nice aside from Jesus. That is obvious. You can see that.

## **Prayer**

Father, we give You thanks for Your word that establishes us to think properly. As we begin to see the church and the fundamentals thereof, we begin to see that it is the word of God, the Gospel, that becomes central to everything that is done. We realize that there

are doors that You provide, doors of opportunities to do something good; but they are doors for the Gospel. When people hear the Gospel and reject it, there is no good. We know this would transform them. So, Lord, we as a church gather around Your goodness. We are not affirmed by man. We do this in Jesus' name. Amen.