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Acts 14:1-7

Costly Joy

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.

(Pastor Prays)

In 2016 there is a sure and certain cost that comes with following Christ, a cost that comes with the sincerely held real beliefs in what C.S. Lewis called "mere Christianity."

The world we live in is a boiling, seething cauldron of confusion...even on things as basic as being male and female and which restrooms the different sexes should use and if you believe that *God* assigns gender instead of *people* deciding gender. You find yourself on the wrong side of history and Bruce Springsteen won't come to your state.

Friends, I don't mind being on the *wrong* side of history as long as I am on the *right* side of God. But what has always been true is still true today: basic Christianity is costly but it has always been like that. To follow Christ and to love His word and to live for His

glory is nothing to be trifled with. It's a joyful pursuit that puts you at odds with a world gone mad, a world that needs Christ.

But so often what masquerades as Christianity is an emotional clone of Christianity, a clone that looks like the real thing but is hollow and gutless, vacuous and dull. And that's not the Christianity of the Bible. The Christianity of the Bible is dangerously powerful, strangely transformational and always controversial. The flame of the cross always draws the bug of controversy. You see that truth lived out right here in the story before us. Paul and Barnabas have traveled 90 miles to a place called Iconium, having been driven out of town in Chapter 13 only to find themselves right before being stoned to death in v. 5 of this story and, yet, when they spoke, v. 1 says that they spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. I want to have that kind of religious faith. That is, not just what I *say*, but *how* I say it that means a contagious joyful Christianity. I think we see from this story that...

Following Christ Means a Costly Joy

The question, then, is how do we live bearing the cost and experiencing the joy? I'd like to suggest a couple of ways to live:

Live With Conviction

Real conviction, conviction that has teeth, conviction that moves you to action. V. 1 tells us Paul and Barnabas have traveled to Iconium, and notice how Luke describes their speaking: V. 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.* They spoke in such a way that it wasn't just the Gospel, it was the way they were saying it. You understand that *you* are the message. You are not just the *carrier* of the Good News, you *are* the Good news. You don't just *talk* about God's grace, you are a *trophy* of God's grace. If that's the case, then how do we live out our convictions? Let me make a couple of suggestions:

- Be Genuinely Authentic. By God's grace. Be who you are with the understanding that you are not a finished product. It's good to be open and fully aware of what God has done in you but it takes humility. Paul is a great example of this. When

he writes to a young protégé, Timothy, he describes himself in 1 Timothy 1:13-16 *¹³ though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, ¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. ¹⁶ But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.* Here's the example Paul is saying: If Christ can save *me*, He can save *anybody*. Let's you and I not act like we are perfect when we see someone else without Christ or living in some sin. Let's you and I take a stance of the great Puritan John Bradford when he saw evildoers taken to the place of execution. He said, "But for the grace of God, there I go." Live with conviction by being genuinely authentic.

- Affectionate Determination. You'll find that in the text. Let me show it to you. v. 2 tells us that unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds. Now notice the first phrase in v. 3 *so (because of that) they remained for a long time*. Luke is telling us the situation at hand, *therefore they stayed* which really doesn't make sense to our modern minds. For us, if the situation at hand, if it's bad, I'm moving on. Life's too short to waste it in a tough spot. Find some other job. Find some other spouse. Life's too short not to be happy. That's not a life of convictions. That's a life of comfort and convenience.

Paul and Barnabas had this affectionate determination to stay for the Gospel's sake, to stay in the stirred up, poisoned place, knowing that the Gospel demands that of us. It's worth noting the word choice Luke uses in v. 2 to describe the volatile situation they were ministering in. And as I prepared this message, I couldn't help but see the parallels with our day. V. 2, The unbelieving Jews were poisoning their minds against the brothers. Poison and embittering. When you are poisoned, it's a passive destruction. You might even be taking poison in and actually think you are taking something good. It happens from time to time with food poisoning. It happened this year with one of our country's greatest products

– Blue Bell Ice Cream. Last year, 3 people died because of listeria, a poison in the ice cream. Poison gets introduced and you don't even know it. I think that's what has happened in America in terms of gender identity and sexuality. And I'll be careful here because I know we have children in the room. Read Romans 1 and you see that sexual confusion flourishes when Christ is denied. And that's where we are. It's where we live in a world that has been slowly poisoned to the degree that Bruce Springsteen won't come to our state because we don't want men using a women's restroom. It's where God has placed us. V.2 says they were in a hostile environment. V. 3, "so" or "therefore" or "And because of that" they didn't run, hide or cloister up or pull out of the world. The text says they stayed there a long time and spoke boldly for the Lord, and the Lord bore witness to the word of His grace. If following Christ is a costly joy, we live with conviction. But we also...

Live With Courage

The word is "boldness." In V. 3, Paul and Barnabas weren't intimidated by the opposition, they were inspired. The opposition didn't scare them, it inspired them. They were bold. Boldness is that essential quality without which nothing significant can be accomplished for the Gospel. Boldness persists in the face of opposition and is born out of a real confidence in the saving power of Christ. It's the goodness of God in working all things for His glory.

The story goes on in the passage. V. 5 says the opposition was planning to kill Paul and Barnabas. Boldness doesn't mean you don't have good sense. V. 6 says they learned of the danger and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia and there they continued to preach the Gospel. And the Gospel spoken always has its intended effect. We do the witnessing, praying and ministry; God does the saving. There is a little verse at the end of Chapter 13 that ought to give you great confidence in the power of the Gospel. At the end of Chapter 13 Paul and Barnabas are in ministry in the midst of opposition. People were arguing with him and reviling him and contradicting him, and Paul said he was leaving to go to the Gentiles; and Luke tells us in Acts 13:48 *And when the Gentiles*

heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

That's God's grace that tells us while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, and following Christ is costly. But it's a costly *joy*.

As we close, I would like to talk to those of you that are not believers...

(Pastor shares the Gospel message and Prays)