Study of Acts – Discussion Notes Chapter 14

Introduction
Illus: My daughter was recently looking for a job as a dental assistant. We encouraged her to take her resume to every dental office she could find. But she only wanted to go to those that she knew were looking for help. She would spend hours on the internet researching dental offices and looking for opportunities but she was reluctant to go out and cold-call with her resume.

This is because like most of us, she does not like rejection. This is why most of us do not make our living in sales. It is very difficult to not take rejection personal. Rejection discourages and tends to hurt our feelings.

In Acts 14, we see Paul and Barnabas facing multiple kinds of rejection. However, Paul and Barnabas had a long memory when it came to the gospel and a short memory when it came to people’s rejection. By the power of the Holy Spirit they remained steadfast at the work to which they were called.

Content
1. Nobody Likes Rejection (vs. 1-7)
   Ask anyone who employs commissioned sales people and they will tell you people are afraid of rejection. As a general rule, people simply do not like being rejected.
   Illus: A young man is reluctant to ask a girl out. Why? They fear the idea of being rejection.
   What does rejection generally mean to us? Usually it just means being told No.
   Solicit testimonies of anyone who has tried sales and did not like it (vacuum cleaners, etc.).
   What are some things rejection meant to Paul and Barnabas? It meant rejecting Christ, rejecting God’s grace and persecution of the messenger.
   Paul and Barnabas met with tremendous acceptance and terrible rejection at Iconium.
   How does rejection normally affect us? One rejection can damper many successes.
   Illus: “Splinters in our pride.” Consider how much discomfort a splinter can cause.
   As a pastor, there have been times when one cranky comment from a church member after the Sunday morning worship would obsess my mind to the exclusion of dozens of positive responses. I would brood for hours on Sunday afternoon. When those splinters collected and festered, they were the cause of an overall low-grade spiritual fever that was doing what a slight physical fever does—I was not sick enough to go to bed, nor well enough to be effective.
   Rejection can be painful and hurtful. We will talk more about dealing with rejection in a moment.

2. Rejection Has Many Forms (vs. 8-20)
   How did the people or Lystra respond to the healing of the lame man?
   How was this a form of rejection?
   Some people try to divide and conquer; others simply include and conquer. In Lystra, Paul and Barnabas met with a type of rejection that is still prevalent today.
In reality the people had missed the message. They had not heard the gospel in its purest form but rather were transforming the gospel to accommodate their beliefs. In reality, they were hearing what they wanted to hear.

This is a form of rejection of the worse kind. People today want to take the gospel and tweak it to meet their own beliefs and presuppositions. They don’t want to hear what the entire Bible says, just the parts that gives them the good feelings. As long as they are hearing what they want to hear and believe, they are happy. But, let the instructions challenge their preconceived ideas and they will quickly turn on the messenger.

People will often turn on their leaders when the leader doesn’t fit the mold they have in mind for them. Ultimately, Paul was stoned, dragged out of the city and left for dead. I see this too often in our churches today when a pastor does preach the Word with boldness. People say they want to hear the truth of God’s word but when a preacher touches on a sensitive area; he goes from preaching to meddling. At that point, they began to demonize the messenger and look for ways to rid themselves of the messenger.

This too is a form of rejection. I guess you can consider it conditional acceptance in that the message is received as long as it coincides with the beliefs of the hearer.

3. Overcoming Rejection

While similar in some ways, there is considerable difference between selling vacuum cleaners and sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. Obviously, the purpose and value of each are worlds apart. However, in each case it is often the fear of rejection that hinders us from being persistent.

But there are ways to overcome rejection especially as it relates to gospel. If we have a clear understanding of how to overcome the rejection, we can be faithful to our calling just as Paul and Barnabas were faithful.

a. Recognize that rejection can be good.

One key to overcoming rejection is to recognize not all rejection is bad. This is especially true in spiritual matters. Every believer shares a common enemy with our Lord; Satan. When we encounter rejection and obstacles, this is a sure sign the Spirit is working through us.

If we are not encountering opposition, it is probably because we are not doing the work of the Holy Spirit. Satan loves an unproductive Christian. A Christian who remains silent is as good as an opposing team member who makes a basketball goal on the wrong end of the court. Satan shouts “keep him in the game.”

If Paul and Barnabas had just gone to these cities and made friends without ever encountering opposition, this would have been a sure sign they were not preaching the truth of the gospel to people where were lost. If they had only associated with believers, they would have never encountered rejection.

b. Believe in the cause with all your heart.

Illus: As I reflected on the subject of rejection, I decided to call a lady in our church that has been very successful in the business of selling life insurance. Many people attempt this line of work but very few succeed because of the rejection they encounter. I called her and began to get her perspective on the subject of rejection. Her response was surprising to me. After talking to her for a few minutes I finally said, “You are ignorant of what I am talking about aren’t you?”
She said she never really thinks about rejection. She believes very strongly in the importance of life insurance and takes great comfort in seeing the benefit being paid out to love ones at death. She indicated she never thinks about rejection. In other words, she believes so strongly in the value of her product, she never really notices the rejection. She never gives it a second thought.

Observing Paul and Barnabas we realize this was exactly how they felt. The gospel was so implanted in their heart and mind that they just kept getting up and going back to the synagogue or anywhere else someone would listen. They were so consumed with the need of others to hear the good news of Christ that quitting was never a consideration.

This brings you and me to a very challenging question. Is the power of the gospel and its impact on our life so strong that we are willing to share it regardless of the opposition and rejection we encounter? Or, do we find ourselves giving up because of rejection?

c. Trust in the Holy Spirit for your sensitivity.

Illus: This past Sunday at the end of our service we had the normal time where I invite people to come to the alter and pray. After several came and returned to their seats, it appeared it was time to close the invitation. I chose to extend the invitation by having the congregation sing one more verse and pleaded for anyone else who felt led, to come. No one came. I will always be willing to listen to the leadership of the Holy Spirit in such matters even when I do not see the results I expect.

When we learn to trust the Holy Spirit, we become more sensitive to the needs of people and less sensitive to opposition. We learn that often, rejection is really a plea for help from people. We must learn to seek the infilling of the Holy Spirit and live by its leadership without regard to our own emotions and reactions.

The more confident we are in the Holy Spirit and the more we allow it to lead us, the less we worry about our pride. One sure cure for dealing with rejection is to ask the Holy Spirit to lead you not for tasks equal to your abilities but for the power to meet the impossibilities He gives.

Conclusion

Reading Acts chapter 14, one tends to feel sympathy for Paul and Barnabas as they encounter rejection. As if the rejection is not enough, they are dogged by the unbelieving Jews who are willing follow them from town to town disrupting their ministry.

But consider the impact of their devotion.

Lystra: 14:1 “a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed.”

Derbe: 14:21 “After they evangelized that town and made many disciples…”

Lystra, Derbe & Iconium: 14:23 “appointed elders in every church…”

Pisidia, Pamphylia, Perga, Attalia.

At the end of their missionary journey, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Paul and Barnabas were successful. They reported to the church at Antioch that the Holy Spirit had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. By trusting in the Holy Spirit and not being deterred by rejection, God used these men to establish the early churches among Gentiles. Many people came to trust Christ as a result.

Imagine what God wants to do through you and me if we will trust in Him fully.