



Sermon Series: Acts

Sermon Title: When the Gospel Divides

Date: 6/28/2026

Acts 14:1-7

Big Idea: Opposition to the gospel is not a stop sign from God.

When life gets difficult, many of us read resistance as a signal from God to change course. Acts 14:1-7 challenges that assumption directly. Paul and Barnabas arrive in Iconium on their first missionary journey - and what happens in Iconium gives us one of the clearest pictures in the New Testament of what it looks like to stay with something when everything in you wants to leave.

The Gospel Draws Some And Offends Others.

Paul and Barnabas go into the synagogue and speak so effectively that a great number of Jews and Greeks believe (**Acts 14:1**). But verse 2 arrives immediately: the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against them. The word Luke uses - means they weren't neutral. They heard the message, actively chose to reject it, and then worked to undermine it. By verse 4, the city has split.

The division didn't happen in spite of clear preaching - it happened because of it. Jesus said this would happen in **Luke 12:51-53**. When the gospel is clearly presented, people do not all respond the same way. If you have ever shared your faith and felt the room change, that is not evidence you did something wrong. Division in response to the gospel is not a warning sign. It is a description of what happens when the message lands.

Let Opposition Deepen Your Dependence.

Verse 3 is easy to miss but it is the heart of this text: Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace with signs and wonders. Opposition had started, minds were being poisoned, the city was dividing - and they

stayed for what commentators suggest may have been as long as six months. The opposition didn't push them away from God. It pushed them deeper into dependence on God right where they were.

It is tempting to read resistance as God closing a door - but that assumption breaks down when you consider Jesus in Gethsemane, praying in such distress his sweat fell like drops of blood, asking if there was another way, and the Father saying no. Jesus was not out of God's will that night. The suffering was the will. The question worth asking when resistance comes is not just whether things are hard, but what kind of resistance it is - people pushing back against the gospel itself, or something else? Those are not the same thing and they don't call for the same response.

If You Move, Carry The Message.

At some point the opposition in Iconium changes shape. It stops being hostile crowds and poisoned conversations and becomes an organized plot involving local leaders to physically attack Paul and Barnabas. When they hear about it, they leave - crossing into Lystra and Derbe. But notice: this is not the same thing as reading difficulty as a closed door. They didn't leave because things got hard. They stayed through months of that. They left because of a specific, organized threat against their lives - and wisdom recognized that dying in Iconium that day serves no one when Lystra and Derbe haven't heard the gospel yet.

The moment they arrive in the next cities, they preach the gospel there. Same message, new address. The calling didn't change when the location did. This is the pattern across Paul's entire ministry - driven out of Pisidian Antioch, moved on. Driven out of Iconium, moved on. Later stoned and left for dead in Lystra, got up and kept going. The location changes. The mission doesn't. Whatever changes in your life or circumstances, the call to carry the gospel with you doesn't.

Discussion Questions:

- 1. Have you ever read a difficult situation as God closing a door when it may have actually been opposition to the gospel? What made it hard to tell the difference?**
- 2. The sermon points out that the city of Iconium was divided not in spite of clear preaching but because of it. Have you experienced a relationship or situation where sharing your faith created distance? How did you process that?**
- 3. Paul and Barnabas stayed in Iconium for months through active opposition. What does that kind of persistence require, and what does it say about how they understood their calling?**
- 4. The sermon uses Jesus in Gethsemane as evidence that difficulty and being outside God's will are not the same thing. How does that reframe the way you think about hard seasons in your own life?**
- 5. When Paul and Barnabas left Iconium, they went straight to preaching in the next city. What is one area of your life where you have been tempted to let resistance quiet your faith, and what would it look like to carry the message there instead?**