

# The Power of the Gospel and the Poison of the Devil

by Roger Ellsworth

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*The sermon emphasizes the power of the gospel and the poison of the devil, warning that the devil is busy blinding and poisoning people's minds against the gospel.*

**Duration:** 30:59

**Scripture:** Acts 14:1-7

**Topics:** "Gospel"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of the gospel in churches today. He criticizes the trend of pastors focusing on practical matters like relationships and finances instead of preaching the good news of Jesus. The preacher highlights that the gospel is the message of what God has done through Jesus to rescue sinners and give them right standing with God. He emphasizes that the gospel is the only message with the power to save people from their sins and secure their eternal life.

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## Transcript

Well, thank you, Jonathan and Wanda, that was great. I love that old hymn, and it's good to hear it again. I especially love that verse, My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought, My sin, not in part, but the whole, Is nailed to the cross, and here's the best part, I bear it no more, praise the Lord, praise the Lord, Oh my soul.

Well, thank you, Jonathan, that was tremendous, and I appreciate you singing that for us tonight. I never get tired of hearing that. Please find the book of Acts, the 14th chapter, the book of Acts, the 14th chapter, and tonight we're looking at verses 1 through 7 as we continue working our way through this great book of Scripture.

Now, your Bible probably has on the title page for the book of Acts, the Acts of the Apostles, and that title is okay as far as it goes, but I suggest to you that a better title for this book is the Acts of the Lord Jesus Christ through his apostles. That, I suggest, is a more accurate and appropriate title, the Acts of the Lord Jesus Christ through his apostles, because that's what we have here. We have the risen, reigning Lord working in the lives of his people and using his apostles to bring blessing to the people of God and to bring salvation to those who were apart from Christ.

Now, we come to this passage I mentioned a moment ago, Acts chapter 14 and the first seven verses, and we find Paul and Barnabas in the city of Iconium, and they are continuing their first missionary journey. You know that Paul took three missionary journeys, and we are here in his first missionary journey, and as I said, he and Barnabas are in this place called Iconium. Now, if you have a good Bible, you probably have some maps in the back of your Bible, and most Bible maps have at least one map devoted to Paul's missionary journeys, and sometimes one map will show all three journeys, and some Bibles will have a map for each of the three journeys.

And if you have a map in the back of your Bible that shows Paul's first missionary journey, you shouldn't have any trouble locating Iconium. It is in what we would call Turkey, and you will see it there, just a little south of the middle part of Turkey. And so this is where Paul and Barnabas are when we come here to this passage of Scripture.

Now, the message tonight has the title, The Power of the Gospel and the Poison of the Devil. The Power of the Gospel and the Poison of the Devil. And I have the New King James Version here before me, and I think as you hear me read from this translation of Scripture, you'll see how I arrived at this title.

So look with me, please, at the first seven verses of Acts Chapter 14. Now, it happened in Iconium that they went together, and that is Paul and Barnabas, to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude, both of the Jews and the Greeks, believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren.

Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided, part sided with the Jews and part with the apostles. And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews with their rulers to abuse and stone them, they became aware of it, and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region.

And they were preaching the gospel there. And so this is our reading tonight, and again I say that we have here Luke's account of the ministry of Paul and Barnabas in Iconium, and this was part of their first missionary journey. Now, the main feature of the ministry of Paul and Barnabas in Iconium was opposition, opposition.

And if you paid attention to the reading a moment ago, you saw that come out very clearly, didn't you? Paul and Barnabas ran into opposition in Iconium, and the opposition was so strong that it looked to them as if they might lose their lives. Now you may be wondering, well, why are we taking our time to study this book of Acts anyway? Well, there are many, many answers to that question, and you certainly don't want me to take time this evening to give you all the answers to the question of why we're studying the book of Acts. But one reason that we're studying it is because things have not changed a whole lot since the days described here in this book.

And just as Paul and Barnabas encountered opposition in Iconium, so Christians are encountering opposition today. And you heard it here, folks. I think that you can expect this opposition toward Christianity to continue to increase.

And I tell you, we're facing a day here in the United States that many of us thought would never come. We're coming to a time when God's going to separate the wheat from the chaff. It's going to be a very costly thing to be a Christian.

And churches these days and pastors spend a lot of their time fretting over people who make professions of faith and then never come to church. We can't find them and we can't get them interested in church after they've made their profession of faith. I tell you, that won't be a problem as the opposition continues to grow in this country to Bible-believing Christianity.

It will be so tough to be a true Christian in the future that we won't have to worry about people just taking up the profession. They won't dare take up the name Christian because it will be a very costly thing to be a Christian. And we're already seeing this opposition.

When I began preaching, I won't tell you how many years ago, when I began preaching several years ago, there wasn't much opposition to the cause of Christ. Oh, there was some. But it has grown by leaps and bounds in the years that I have been in the gospel ministry.

And now we've reached a point here in this country where Christianity is ridiculed openly, held up as an object of scorn, treated with contempt and disdain. Who would ever have thought a few years ago that we would have come to such a day in this country? And I say again, my estimation is that it's going to get worse. And God is going to, I think, put his people through the fire.

And he's going to test our faith. And we need to be aware of that. So Paul and Barnabas run into opposition here in Iconium.

Now, you'll find as you follow the missionary journeys of Paul that Paul had a pattern. When he'd go into a new town, he would, on the Sabbath day, go to the synagogue. Now, he's in Gentile cities on these missionary journeys.

But every Gentile city in those days had a sizable Jewish population. And so Paul's pattern was to go first to the synagogue and begin preaching to the Jews, and invariably he would run into the same thing. The Jews would reject the message.

The message, after all, was this, that Jesus was indeed the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. Jesus was their long-awaited Messiah. And those Jewish people hated that message with an intense hatred.

And so Paul would go and preach to the Jews, and they'd get angry. And then Paul would say, Since you spurned my message, I will go to the Gentiles. And that's exactly what you find happening here in the city of Iconium.

Paul and Barnabas go first to the Jews. They preach there in the synagogue. And right there it is in verse 1. They went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and they so spoke that a great multitude, both of the Jews and Greeks, believed.

They so spoke. Oh, would you pray for this pastor that he would so speak that people would come to the knowledge of Christ. Well, this is a thrilling thing.

Both Jews and Gentiles are converted here under the ministry of Paul and Barnabas. Wouldn't it be thrilling to see some conversions here at Parkview? How we need a pouring out of God's Spirit upon us. How long has it been since we have seen any conversions? How long has it been since this church has seen conversions in abundance? How long are we willing to go on without seeing conversions? Are you asking God for converting power in our services? Are you seeking His face? Well, pray that when I speak,

I will speak in such a way that I will so speak that there will be power to save in our services.

We should be yearning for this. Some of you may be saying, well, pastor, the times are different. They're just too hard.

What are we saying? Are we saying the times are too hard for God? Perhaps we ought to remind ourselves of what the angel Gabriel said to Mary when he went to her to tell her that she was going to bear a son. And this son would not have a human father. He would be conceived by the Holy Spirit.

And you remember what Gabriel said to Mary? Nothing, nothing is impossible with God. And would God that we here would believe that nothing is impossible with God. Some of you are saying, well, circumstances here at Parkview are just too difficult.

Are they too difficult for God? Well, if they are, we need then to just close up shop, go home, and forget about this. But if we believe that God is greater than our difficulties, if we believe nothing is impossible with God, we have hope, and we should ask God to pour out saving power right here at Parkview Church. Well, this then begins in a very promising fashion, doesn't it? But look at verse 2. The unbelieving Jews, not all the Jews believed.

Most of them did not. And they stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren. And so then you have this opposition that arises in Iconium.

Verse 4 says the multitude was divided. And verse 5 says when a violent attempt was made to abuse and stone Paul and Barnabas, they became aware of it and they fled. And so this is what they encountered there.

And I say again, their pattern was to go first to the Jews and to preach to them, and then when they were rejected there, to take their message to the Gentiles. But the message tonight has the title, The Power of the Gospel and the Poison of the Devil. And as you may have guessed, this message has two parts to it.

There are two points. I want to first of all talk with you about the power of the gospel. And we've already taken note of this.

I want you to see that it was the gospel that Paul and Barnabas preached in Iconium. It was the gospel that Paul and Barnabas preached in Iconium. That needs to be stressed.

There was a time in Baptist churches where preachers and the people in their congregation would not think of anyone ever preaching anything else from the pulpit except the gospel. But my friend's gospel preaching has, well, my mother, I think, would probably call on one of her old sayings to describe it. She'd probably say if she could be around Baptist churches today, gospel preaching's gotten as scarce as hen's teeth.

That's pretty scarce. That was one of her favorite sayings. Got scarce as hen's teeth.

And it's increasingly difficult to find gospel preaching today. I'm telling you that they preached the gospel there in Iconium. Some of you may be saying, well, how do you know they preached the gospel? Well, look there at verse 3. They stayed there a long time speaking boldly in the Lord who was bearing witness to the word of his grace.

The word of his grace. What is that? Well, that's the gospel. The gospel is the word of his grace.

The word of God's grace. And that's what Paul and Barnabas preached. And then if you look down there at verse 7, you find that they were preaching the gospel after they left Iconium in these other cities, the cities of Lycaonia.

They preached the gospel there. It stands to reason, doesn't it, that Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel in Iconium. And then when they had to leave Iconium, they preached the gospel in these other cities as well.

They preached the gospel. And the gospel was powerful because we've already seen that both Jews and Gentiles came to faith. Both Jews and Gentiles believed as they heard the gospel preached.

Well, my friends, we should believe in the power of the gospel. Paul says over there in Romans chapter 1, I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation. What's Paul saying? Paul is saying this is the message that God chooses to bless to the saving of the souls of men and women.

The gospel. God's power goes out with the gospel. And we should believe that, that the gospel is a powerful message.

Now, you may say, well, why do you emphasize the gospel so much? Because I believe that people are facing eternity. And as I said in a message here not long ago, eternity is divided into two parts. There's eternal life and there's eternal misery or eternal destruction.

Eternal woe, if you please. And I believe that if people are going to go into eternal life, they've got to be saved, forgiven of their sins. And this is the reason I preach the gospel because only the gospel has the power to save people from their sins and give them right standing with God.

You may be saying, well, what is the gospel? Surely no one in this audience would be saying that because we've got the cream of the crop here tonight. But here's the gospel. The gospel is the good news of what God has done in and through his son Jesus to rescue sinners from their sins and from the condemnation of their sins.

To give them right standing with God now and to give them eternal glory in the future. Isn't it amazing that more people are not interested in the gospel today? Did you hear what I just said? The gospel is the good news of what God has done in and through his son Jesus to rescue sinners from their sins and the condemnation of their sins. And to give them right standing with God now and to give them eternal glory in the future.

My goodness, what a glorious thing the gospel is. And how sad it is that the gospel is becoming increasingly rare in our churches today. You go to many churches today and you would hear pastors say things like this.

Well, I've noticed you people seem to be having a hard time getting along. So I'm going to talk to you about how to mend your relationships. Go to many churches today and you'd hear the pastor say something like this.

Well, some of you people seem to be having trouble in these harsh economic times in which we live. You're having a hard time managing your finances. So I'm going to give you some tips on how to manage your money.

Can you imagine Paul and Barnabas saying such things? No, Paul and Barnabas went into Iconium with the deep seated realization that they were preaching to an eternity bound people. Listen, your financial problems are not going to last long. You're going to die one of these days and your financial problems are going to be over.

Your problems getting along with other people, they're not going to last long. You're going to die one of these days. And that's all going to be over and done with.

But when you die, you're going out into eternity and you're going to face God. And you had better be prepared to face God. And there's only one thing that can prepare you.

And that is the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so here's the power of the gospel. How we need in these days.

All across this land and country. To come back to the gospel. And how we need to believe that there is actually saving power.

Saving power in the gospel. Now if there's saving power in the gospel, I think the gospel ought to be preached, don't you? And if there's saving power in the gospel. I just submit to you that we can't expect people to be saved if we don't preach the gospel.

Well, now some of you are saying, well Pastor, you preach the gospel here and we're not seeing many people saved. Well, we're going to keep preaching the gospel. Would you help? Would you help in the preaching of the gospel? Would you put some wings on this preaching? Would you support the preaching of the gospel with the pouring out of your heart to God to make the preaching effective? Would you support the preaching of the gospel with prayer? So that we can see here fulfilled what Paul says.

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. We're not seeing a lot of people saved with the gospel being preached. We're sure not going to see anybody saved if we don't preach it.

Because God has invested saving power in the gospel. Well, I could go on and talk here at good length about this. You see here in this passage what the proper response to the gospel is, don't you? It's to believe.

It's to believe. If you want to be saved, you've got to abandon every other hope. And you've got to rest entirely on the gospel.

We read that many Jews, many Gentiles believe. That's always the proper response to the gospel. Believe.

Don't trust in your good works. Don't trust in church membership. Don't trust in anything.

Take as your own the words of that great old hymn. Nothing in my hand I bring simply. To thy cross I cling.

That's the proper response to the gospel. But I want to come here to the second major point of the message. And that is the poison of the devil.

And you may be saying to me, well, now, Pastor, I've been going through these verses ever since you read them. And you mentioned at the beginning this business about the poison of the devil. Now, I don't find the devil mentioned here.

How do you get this business about the poison of the devil? Well, look there at verse 2. Where we're told the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren. Now, you're right if you're sitting there saying that the devil is not mentioned here. But my contention is that while the devil's name is not here, his fingerprints are here.

And I will tell you that this is the work of the devil to poison the minds of unbelievers against the gospel. And while I'm talking about this, I'm thinking of 2 Corinthians chapter 4. And there we find something very similar to what we have just noticed here in Acts 14. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4, 3, If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.

And look, whose minds the God of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. Paul says, you know, there's a God of this world. And that's not God with capital G, that's God with small g. There's a God of this world.

And that God of this world is none other than the devil. And he says in 2 Corinthians 4, he's blinded the minds of people so they won't believe in the gospel. Now, here in Acts 14, it's not blinded the minds of people, it's poisoned their minds.

Oh, listen, the devil is busy at work these days. He's working very hard right here in Jackson, I'd say. There are a lot of people whose minds have been poisoned against the gospel.

Why is it that most people tonight have no interest in the things of God? Ah, the devil has been at work. He's blinded their minds. That's the reason, Paul says, they don't believe in the gospel.

It's because their minds are blinded. Their minds are poisoned. Now, the devil never lacks for tricks, does he? He never lacks a strategy.

He always has a strategy. And how is the devil going about this business of blinding the minds of people today? How is he poisoning their minds? Well, one way he does it is he tells them, there's really no need for this business. Here Ellsworth is down here at Parkview Church.

And he's standing up there and he's preaching to these poor people this business about God saving people from their sins. But he says, we're all basically good folks. We really don't need saving.

I dare say if you go out in Jackson tonight and talk to people, just randomly, that this is the thing you'll find again and again and again, is that they don't see that they need saving because they are good people. They'll say something like this, well, now I've made my mistakes. I'm not perfect.

But they'll go on to say, I, you know, I'm basically a good person. Listen, you'll never go to a doctor until you understand that you're sick and you'll never go to the gospel until you understand that you're a sinner. Our problem today is not getting people saved.

Our problem is getting people lost, getting them lost. Let a man get lost where he understands that he's standing guilty and condemned before a holy God. You won't have to worry about him getting saved.

He'll get saved if you can get him lost. Our problem is we can't get most people in Jackson lost. They say, well, I feel like I'm okay.

I'm not such a bad person. Yeah, maybe, maybe somebody like Osama bin Laden, maybe he needs to be saved. But, you know, I'm not Osama bin Laden.

I'm a pretty good fellow. I put bird seeds out for the birds in the wintertime. And when I see a puppy dog, I pat him on the head and I speak nicely to babies.

And so I'm a pretty good fellow. The most common view of salvation in America today is salvation by niceness, just by being generally pleasant, easy to get along with. And the next most common view is salvation by death.

You kick the bucket and you're in. Those are the things that most people believe. And how did they come to these conclusions? The devil has poisoned their minds.

And the devil not only tells people that they're not sinners. He not only tells them that they're not facing judgment. You shouldn't worry about this judgment business.

This is a different day and age. Nobody believes like that anymore. But he also goes on to say, well, just suppose for a moment, suppose that we are sinners and we need to be saved.

Can you think of a more ridiculous way of saving people than this? A Jewish rabbi hangs on a cross outside the city of Jerusalem and that's supposed to save us? And so he suggests that the gospel is absurd. And this is another way he poisons minds. And then after that, he goes on to say something like this.

Well, look at these people who profess to believe the gospel. They're not any better than anybody else. They're all a bunch of hypocrites.

Just look at them. And that's one of the most common objections you'll hear tonight toward Christianity. Why? These people who believe the gospel, it hasn't made any difference in their lives.

But it doesn't matter which strategy Satan uses. It all comes down to the same thing. He's poisoning, poisoning the minds of unbelievers.

And so here it is in Iconium. You've got the power of the gospel, but you've also got the poison of the devil. Iconium is gone.

And these people who opposed Paul and Barnabas, they're gone. But the gospel is still here. And the question tonight is this.

We're facing the same choice that these people faced centuries ago. Will we believe the gospel or will we believe the devil? And that's not only a question for unbelievers. It's a question for the church of Jesus Christ.

Do we believe there is saving power in the gospel? Or do we believe the poison of the devil? Let's pray together.

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