

## The Gospel on Collision Course

### Acts 14

We are back in the book of Acts. This series is called 'Turning the World Upside Down' because the early church did just that. You might dream of leaving your mark on the world, these guys did it!

We rejoin the apostles, Barnabas and Paul halfway through the first mission trip to the gentile world. We're going to see what happens when the good news of Jesus collides with pagan culture. It has a lot to say to our own situation.

#### **Preaching the Truth**

In the city of Iconium a great number of Jews and Greeks believed. What was the apostles' message that had such an impact? It was the good news of God's grace to us in Jesus. But it was also that message that got them into trouble.

Whilst Iconium was a big city, Lystra was a rural backwater. On the surface it seems very different from us, but it isn't. Through Paul's preaching a man gets healed, and the people think that two Greek gods, Zeus and Hermes have come down and they want to offer sacrifices to them. But by what they do and say, Paul and Barnabas tell the people that they are believing wrong things about God. In fact, they experienced the opposition they did, precisely because the message of Jesus' grace collided with other views about God.

But today, many people are influenced by the new atheists: who think they have got rid of all gods. But at Lystra the apostles are horrified that the people would worship them (men) as gods. But what do the new atheists worship? Human reason, or science or the natural world. They have made these things their god. And the message of Jesus' grace collides with that world-view: it says don't worship these things, but worship God who has created these things.

#### **Paying the Price**

We all like to be liked, which is why we can run away from confrontation. But standing for the truth will inevitably bring you into conflict because, whilst the gospel unites, it also divides. But that people do not like the message, does not make it wrong.

What can we learn from how the apostles handled opposition?

**Firstly**, opposition is a reason to keep telling the truth, not a reason to quit.

**Secondly**, they also knew when it was time to withdraw.

**Thirdly**, they understood the fickleness of human nature.

**Fourthly**, they embraced the cost for the sake of Christ.

#### **The Courage to do Both**

It is remarkable how near, and yet how far, the pagans at Lystra were from the truth. They think the gods have come down to them in human form, and want to sacrifice to them. Paul is telling them the good news, that God has come down in human form, in Jesus, and sacrificed himself for them. When you understand all that Jesus has done for you: it will enable you to love and forgive those who oppose you and the gospel; and it will enable you to sacrifice and serve others with joy and gladness, because Jesus has sacrificed himself for you.