The Great Commission in Action

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[0:00] Chapter 14.

We're going to do the whole chapter tonight.! That's the goal. So we know from Scripture and from our Lord's instruction! that all Christians, all who have been born again, are commanded by Him to make disciples.
Pretty clear. Matthew 28, 18-20. As Jesus had risen and right before He ascended, He gave this instruction. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.
Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and behold, I am with you always to the end of the age.
And I know I said it on Sunday, but I think a lot of times we see baptism as the finish line in a believer's life when truly it's the starting point.
[1:12] Making disciples involves more than just sharing the gospel and baptizing them as Jesus gave that clear instruction in the Great Commission. It includes teaching them also to observe the commandments that He has given us and to encourage them to walk in His ways and to live their life for Him.

And so if you recall, Paul and Barnabas have set out on their first missionary journey. Their gospel proclamation has seen some results.
Many have come to faith in Christ, and many have rejected Christ as a result of their preaching the gospel. But at the end of chapter 13, if you remember from our study in last week, they were kicked out of Antioch and Pisidia.
However, again, many disciples were made there, and the persecution of the unbelievers of that city, though it was intense, did not deter these two men from their task.
They did not tuck their tails. They did not head home. But instead, they continued to share the gospel and continued to be used of the Lord to advance His kingdom.
[2:23] So in this passage, Paul and Barnabas show us in chapter 14 the characteristics we need to seek to have by the Holy Spirit's help to develop in ourselves as we continue to carry out the Great Commission.

And so the main idea for this chapter is making disciples requires Christ-like character and commitment.
Making disciples requires Christ-like character and commitment. In verses 1 through 23, those verses reveal the Christ-like character of Paul and Barnabas as they continue to go from city to city, sharing the gospel, making disciples, even when they were doing so in the face of intense persecution.
And then in verses 24 through 28, they reveal to us the commitment of Paul and Barnabas to train the disciples that the Lord had made through their ministry.
So first, let's look at the Christ-like characteristics that produce followers of Christ to make followers of Christ.
[3:42] So the first characteristic is boldness. Boldness in Iconium in verses 1 through 7. So again, Paul and Barnabas have been kicked out of Antioch and Pisidia.

And instead of heading home, because they felt defeated, they continue on to the next town, which is Iconium, which was about eight miles southeast of Antioch.
In verse 1 it says, 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. So we've already seen this is Paul's method.

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He goes into a city, he finds that there's a synagogue there, and he goes to the Jews first, and he preaches Christ from the Old Testament. However, as was the case in Antioch, the jealousy of the unbelieving Jews and their hostility to the gospel soon took form in verse 2.
But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. But once again, Paul and Barnabas, they're used to this by now.
[4:52] They're undeterred by the negative reaction that some have to the gospel. They've come to expect it. But though their opponents took offense to the gospel, they didn't stop sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with boldness.

In verse 3, the beginning of verse 3, So they remained for a long time in the face of this persecution, and they were speaking boldly for the Lord. The enemies of the gospel were working here as they had before, to slowly poison the minds of the public, to discredit Paul and Barnabas, and to discredit their message.
And we've seen this in the New Testament already, haven't we? Think back to Jesus and how the Pharisees were guilty of doing the same thing, trying to poison the public's perspective of him, twisting his words, taking them out of context, opposing him, challenging him.
But once again, the gospel was creating divisions in Iconium that we've seen it create in other places, just as it created division in Jerusalem, just as Jesus said that the gospel would create these divisions in Matthew 10, 34 through 36.
There our Lord said, Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.
[6:27] And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. And so we've seen to this point, we're still seeing it here in this chapter, that when we preach the gospel clearly and boldly, it will get results.

Sometimes those are positive results and sometimes those are negative results. In 2 Corinthians 2, verses 15 through 17, Paul talked about this effect that the gospel and Christians have on unbelievers.
He says, Therefore, we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To one, a fragrance from death to death. To the other, a fragrance from life to life.
Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not like so many peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God in the sight of God, we speak in Christ.
So once again, Paul and Barnabas, far from being intimidated by the hostility of the unbelievers, were instead inspired to give even bolder witness to the truth that they know that they had in Jesus Christ.
[7:41] MacArthur, John MacArthur, has a good quote on this verse. He said, Boldness is that essential quality without which nothing significant can be accomplished for the gospel.

Boldness is what enables believers to persist in the face of opposition. And as we follow the ministry of the Apostle Paul, no doubt that boldness was something that characterized his ministry, as he mentions in 2 Thessalonians 2.2.
But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our Lord to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.
Boldness characterized Paul. Boldness also characterized Peter and John. If you recall earlier in Acts, when they were given strict instructions by the Sanhedrin to stop preaching in the name of Jesus, they responded in this way in Acts 4, verses 19-20.
Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.
[8:56] When Peter and John were confronted by the Sanhedrin's threats and when they shared those threats with the church, the response of the church was to pray for even greater boldness.

In Acts 4, verse 29. And now, Lord, they pray, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.
So in the face of persecution, they responded by preaching with greater boldness about the good news of Jesus Christ. And again, the source of their boldness was Christ, was the truth that they had in Christ because Jesus was bold.

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Jesus did not fear men or what they might do to Him. If you recall, He continually called out the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and He was unafraid to confront people in their sin.
He was also bold in the initiatives He took to associate with sinners who the Pharisees thought were beyond redemption. And He was bold enough to go to them and share with them who He was and what He had come to do.
[10:07] He wasn't afraid of men and their opinions. He was bold. And that was the source of His disciples and the apostles' boldness. As Paul and Barnabas continued to boldly preach the gospel, their witness was confirmed by demonstration of the Holy Spirit's power.

Look at the rest of verse 3. So as they get more emboldened as they preach, it says there, the Lord, who bore witness to the word of His grace, granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.
And again, just as Jesus' miracles were performed to confirm that the words He spoke about Himself were true, so here He solidified the testimony of His apostles with supernatural demonstration that the gospel that they were preaching with boldness was in fact true.
Yet again though, despite the bold preaching of Paul and Barnabas and despite the Spirit's signs and wonders that confirmed their testimony, the opposition from the unbelieving Jews was not diminished at all.
In verse 4, it says there, but the people of the city were divided. Some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. When an attempt was made by both Jews and Gentiles with their rulers to mistreat them and to stone them, they learned of it.
[11:35] And again, isn't it interesting how enemies of one another, Jews and Gentiles, Gentiles, are willing to come together to persecute Christians.

The same thing happened to Jesus. The Jewish authorities, many of whom hated the Romans and hated the fact that the Romans occupied their lands, as did the Jewish people, sought the help of the Romans in order to put Jesus to death on the cross.
So these enemies once again unite and conspire together against their only hope of salvation, which is tragic.
Paul and Barnabas were bold, but they were not foolish. And so when they heard of this plan, knowing that the Lord still had more for them to do, they fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lyconia, and to the surrounding country, and they continued to preach the gospel.
So again, as it has been the case before, so it continues to be the case today, that persecution of the gospel does not put an end to it, but actually spreads it.
[12:51] And so here we see they face persecution, and they are going to respond by going further out into the surrounding regions and continuing to preach the gospel with boldness.

So in order to make disciples, we must be bold. And I think sometimes we get the wrong idea of what boldness is. Sometimes we think boldness is yelling or pounding on the pulpit or something like that.
That can be boldness, but sometimes boldness is just confronting someone in their sin in a gentle yet gracious way. It's not turning a blind eye to what's going on, and it's providing that encouragement and that instruction.
And so we're bold in that way as well. Jesus was bold when he sat down with the woman at the well and told her that he knew everything that was going on in her life. But he did so in such a way because he wanted to reveal himself to her as the Messiah who had been promised and who had come and who would save her from her sins.
So we must be bold as we make disciples. Second characteristic that we must have is that we must be humble. And so we see here from Paul and Barnabas their humility in Lystra.
[14:06] Their humility in Lystra. In verse 8, Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked.

And so here Luke makes it pretty clear, doesn't he? This man, he says three things about him. He can't use his feet. He's crippled. He's never walked before in his life.
And so he does this to emphasize the fact that his condition appeared to be hopeless. But we see that he was listening to Paul speaking.
He was listening to Paul preaching. And the Holy Spirit turned Paul's eyes to him. And in verse 9, Paul looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well said in a loud voice, stand right up on your feet.

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And so here Paul recognizes an opportunity given to him by the Spirit to confirm his message, the message of the gospel, with a miraculous sign.
[15:15] And so the man who had never taken a step before in his entire life promptly sprang up and began walking in verse 10. After God performed through Paul the spectacular miracle of healing the crippled man, the crowds reacted.

And they reacted in a strange way in verse 11. And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices saying in Lyconian, the gods have come down to us in the likeness of men.
So this is interesting. There was a legend at this time in Lystra recorded by the Roman poet Ovid who died in AD 17 that at some point in time in their history Zeus and Hermes had come to the town and they were in disguise.
But when they arrived and asked for food and they asked for lodging, everyone in that city refused them except for one man whose name was Philemon, not the Philemon of Scripture.
This is a legend. It didn't really happen. But this is what they believed. You understand what I'm saying? And he was a peasant. And Philemon and his wife, according to this story, took them in and their inhospitable neighbors were drowned by Zeus in a flood because of their unwillingness to give them food and shelter.
[16:37] However, Philemon and his wife who lived in a humble cottage had their house transformed into a temple to Zeus where they served as priest and priestess and then later, according to the alleging, after their death, they were turned into two stately trees.

What kind of eternity is that? You know? I think, I don't want to be a tree when I die. I much rather have the truth that we know that we go to be with the Lord and then eventually the glorification that comes at the end of time.
So anyhow, that's what they had believed. That's what they had heard. That was a story that they had probably grown up hearing. And so, determined not to repeat the mistake of their ancestors in verse 12, says, Barnabas, they called Zeus and Paul Hermes because he was the chief speaker. And so, they began to worship them as gods. And that made me think of the scene in Return of the Jedi where C-3PO, you know, he's the golden robot and the Ewoks worship him as a god and they're all in awe of C-3PO and none of the other gang can understand what the Ewoks are saying and Luke uses the force to make C-3PO float.
You guys know what I'm talking about? Okay. Maybe we need to watch that next Wednesday. Lee, that could be the Bible study.
[18:11] Oh, goodness. Yeah. But it appears that Paul and Barnabas couldn't understand their language.

They were speaking in Lycanian and so, they were confused for a moment but then eventually were able to comprehend what they were doing and then, as they were understanding what the crowd was doing or what the crowd was thinking, the priest of Zeus shows up.
He's not going to be outdone by the people and so, in verse 13, it says, the priest of Zeus whose temple was at the entrance of the city brought oxen and garlands to the gate and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.
So, in their mind, if Zeus had indeed come, then the priest couldn't miss out on this duty, this opportunity to lead the people in worship of him. But, again, eventually, Paul and Barnabas realized what they were planning to do and so, in verse 14 and 15, it says, but when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and, you know, for a Jew to tear their garments is to show how disgusted and how upset they are at what they are seeing or what is happening to them. And so, they tore their garments, they rushed into the crowd and started crying out and I can just imagine them throwing off that garland and ripping it up and pleading with these people saying, men, why are you doing these things?
[19:40] We are also men of like nature to you and we bring good news that you should turn from these vain things to a living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea that is all and all that is in them.

So, Paul and Barnabas are saying, we're not gods. We are men like you and they're trying to make that clear. In fact, they had come to this city to turn people away from this kind of worship to pagan false deities.
But this crowd, it appears, were unversed in the Old Testament. So, it's interesting how, you know, when Paul would go into a synagogue, he would go to the Old Testament scriptures and he would

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preach Christ from those passages which they knew.
But, these people didn't know the Old Testament so he starts with them in a different place and we see that in verse 16 when he says, in past generations he allowed all nations, speaking of God, to walk in their own ways.
Yet, he did not leave himself without witness for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with good, with food and gladness.
[20:54] Excuse me. So, again, since they did not know the Old Testament, Paul appealed to the universal, the rational, the logical knowledge that we have of the Creator through creation.

Something can't come from nothing. Someone, a great designer, must have created all these things and so Paul is starting there to reveal to them, yes, there is this Creator and I know who He is and let me tell you about His Son who has died to save us from our sins.
Paul did this as well later in Acts in chapter 17 when he's meeting with the Greeks in the Areopagus, again in Athens and there, if you remember, he's been through the city and he's seen that they have all of these altars to all of these different gods and over in the corner or amidst all of these altars he sees one to an unknown God because they were afraid that we're going to, we might leave somebody out and that God might get offended and He'll smite us to the unknown God and so Paul started there using that to tell them there is a God that you don't know and then revealing to them who that God is.
Paul revealed the grace of God to tolerate their sin, how God had not wiped out their existence, how He had been gracious to provide them with rain and with food and all of the other common graces that we all enjoy that are supplied ultimately by God but now He's saying the time has come for you to repent.
However, in verse 18 we see even with these words they scarcely restrain the people from offering sacrifice to them. but we see here Paul and Barnabas acting humbly.
[22:50] They would not be worshipped. They refused that from the people. They would not exchange the truth for a lie even if it meant that these people would set them up as gods and serve them as gods and they stood to profit greatly from their misunderstanding.

They would have nothing of it because they were humble and they knew that that was a lie and they knew that ultimately they weren't living for this world but for the kingdom that was yet to come and their mission was to humbly preach the good news of Jesus Christ.
So they've expressed boldness and humility and then thirdly perseverance. Again in Lystra perseverance in Lystra. In verse 19 but the Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and having persuaded the crowds they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city supposing that he was dead.
We're not sure exactly why the Jews from Antioch and Iconium had come to Lystra. It could very well be that they were chasing down Paul and Barnabas and that's what I think was the case.
It could be that they were there on business and they saw Paul and Barnabas who they had recently kicked out of town. preaching the gospel again and that outraged them and so they went after them.
[24:14] Whatever the case we know that Paul and Barnabas continued to preach the gospel. And again like we saw with Jesus and his triumphal entry how the crowds like Paul and Barnabas at one moment they cheered for him and in his arrival and then in just a few days they turned on him demanding that he be crucified.

this crowd went from worshipping Paul and Barnabas as gods to now seeking their death picking up stones to hurl at them until they died.
We don't know why Luke doesn't record the crowds trying to stone Barnabas. It could be that Barnabas had escaped their clutches or it could be that they saw that Paul was the lead spokesman and they went out for him first.
The attempted murderers believed Paul was dead after they had pelted him with stones and so they hauled him off out of the city perhaps unconscious they thought he was dead.
But some of the people in Lystra who had truly been saved and who had truly been transformed by the gospel went to check on Paul and in verse 20 it says but when the disciples gathered about him Paul rose up and he entered the city he went back into the city and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.
[25:45] So that took a lot of faith and that took a lot of guts on Paul's part didn't it? These people thought they had killed him and he gets back up and he goes right back into the town.

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Most people also would have taken some time to recuperate don't you think? I almost died and probably was knocked unconscious no doubt had deep gashes and bruises and was bloody and was beaten but instead of taking time off the very next day he left to continue his mission to go to Derbe which was about 40 miles away a 40 mile walk so that's convicting isn't it?
When we think about how hard we've had it or you know let me just summarize by saying sometimes we're a lot softer than we ought to be as followers of Jesus Christ.
so again he goes off to Derbe with Barnabas a 40 mile walk and they persevered in their affliction Paul wasn't going to stop neither was Barnabas they had been met with intense persecution but they would continue on their journey they were going to continue to preach the gospel in the beginning of verse 21 it says when they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples so they were successful you see the gospel causes division it creates a reaction people will be saved but others will reject the gospel and they will reject it with hostility and will persecute those who share it but in order to make disciples we must persevere now sometimes it's the case as we've seen in scripture where the person who we're sharing the gospel with rejects it at first but there's perseverance in that because we've seen those who have rejected eventually
God softens their heart and saves them so we can't hear someone reject the gospel and automatically think well that's it for you you know continue persevere with them share the good news and even when we are persecuted by others for our faith and trying to share the good news of Jesus Christ we gotta persevere Jesus told us didn't he that we would face much tribulation in this life but we should always take heart because we know that he's overcome the world and the gospel will get a reaction sometimes that reaction will be negative sometimes it will be positive whatever the case we must persevere if we are going to make disciples it's our commission it's what the Lord has commanded us to do to go and to share the good news of Jesus Christ to all people everywhere the fourth characteristic of a disciple maker is compassion compassionate care for believers compassionate care for believers back in verse 21 it says that they returned to [29:02] Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch strengthening the souls of the disciples encouraging them to continue in the faith and saying through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God so again as I said at the beginning the aim of the great commission is not simply to gain professions of faith but to nurture that faith to maturity and so here we see Paul and Barnabas doing just that they don't see a profession of faith in baptism as the finish line but the starting point these new Christians needed encouraging they needed strengthening they needed to be taught they needed to be discipled and they also needed to have order in structure as now they were becoming a local body of believers they were becoming a local church and so not only did Paul and Barnabas give them that that discipling that strengthening that encouraging they also helped them understand how to organize their church and so in verses 24 and 25 it says that as they passed through

Basidia into oh verse 23 excuse me and when they had anointed elders for them in every church with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed and so they identify men in those churches who could serve as their under shepherds who could instruct them and who could help that church as it continued the great commission to go and to make disciples now having cared for these new believers having helped them get established Paul and Barnabas continued on in verses 24 and 25 they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia and when they had spoken the word in Perga they went down to Atalia so we see they're just continuing to go continuing to preach the good news of Jesus Christ and so now we get to the fifth characteristic of making disciples or what should characterize us as we make disciples and that's rejoicing rejoicing in Antioch we rejoice their long journey had come to a completion and so
Paul and Barnabas now at least for this missionary journey it had come to a completion they set sail and they returned to the church that had originally sent them out on this journey in verse 26 and from there they sailed to Antioch not Antioch and Pisidia the Antioch where they had come from and where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled so when Paul and Barnabas get back they have quite a story to tell there's no social media there's no newspapers even there's no cell phones they can't report there's no prayer chain for them to say hey you know Paul almost died yesterday got beaten to death be praying for Paul no doubt the church had been praying for them the whole time but that it was
God who had done it God is the achiever not not us Paul and Barnabas don't take any credit they make sure to point out hey this is what God was doing this is what God has achieved and it was

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God who deserved the glory and it was God in whom they rejoiced in verses 27 and 28 and when they arrived and gathered the church together they declared all that again God had done with them or through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles and they remained no little time with the disciples for about a year they remained there until they would go back out on their next missionary journey so again making disciples requires Christ like character and it requires Christ like commitment how committed was Christ to making disciples he made the ultimate sacrifice he went all the way to the cross knowing that he would become sin knowing that he would become a curse for us knowing that that is what had to happen that was the price that had to be paid in order for us to be redeemed and saved from our sins and so we likewise should be willing to go all the way for him and we know that it will be worth it that this earth and this world is not our home that we have a greater city and a greater kingdom to look forward to and so we should be as committed we're not
Jesus we're not going to be as committed but you understand what I'm saying we should model that same kind of commitment with our lives that he has saved Paul and Barnabas had been used by God to accomplish much for the kingdom because they demonstrated again character and commitment that modeled and reflected that of our risen savior all right so how should we apply these things there's been application through this but more specifically firstly when it comes to boldness God we must remember God has not given us a spirit of fear so if we're afraid to share the gospel or afraid to stand up for Christ that's not an attitude that's not a spirit that he has given to us instead God wants God doesn't want you to be afraid to proclaim the truth he doesn't want us to be afraid to proclaim the truth and we know that he's with us as we do that that his spirit will give us the words to share whenever we have to give a who deserves the glory not us thirdly
[35:47] Christians should never give up or lose hope in the face of persecution so this deals with our perseverance we should never give up and we should never lose hope in the face of persecution because as we've seen Jesus was persecuted and he was crucified and as a result of that the divine foreordaining plan of God we are saved because he was willing to give his life and he rose again and we see with the church the persecution that happened in Jerusalem that caused the church and the disciples to go out and to share the good news of Jesus Christ the word continued to spread as was the case here with Paul and Barnabas as well So we shouldn't lose hope in the the finish line So should we rejoice when a person comes to faith in

Jesus Christ and takes that first step of baptism absolutely but we shouldn't have the thought that well now our work is done here you know who's the next person that we can get dunked in the tank we celebrate man Sunday was awesome that was wonderful and it was so good to see!
we had prayed and you all had supported our kids and our youth so that they were able to go and we had the expectation that God would be at work and he was and we rejoice in that but you know as you I hope looked at every one of those faces you saw that you still have a big responsibility to continue to encourage them and pray for them and to disciple obviously it's a different day and age that they're growing up in but I'm telling you it means a lot and they've got good poker faces and they may not act like you're taking notice of them means that much to them but I promise you that it really truly does so be a part of their lives and seek to encourage them in their walk with Christ and then lastly whenever the gospel is rejected or whether I should say the gospel is rejected or received Christians always have reason to rejoice whether the gospel is rejected or received Christians always have reason to rejoice because we know that for us the best is yet to come that no one can take us out of our Lord's hand that he saves us eternally and we have quite the future to look forward to okay let's pray Lord we thank you for this time that we've been able to have together and Father it's clear to us that you have given us a mission and a purpose to go and to make disciples to baptize them but not to leave them there to continue to teach them and to train them and to encourage them and equip them Lord we've seen a!
demonstration of how that was carried out through the lives of Paul and Barnabas Lord that they were undeterred from the task that you had given to them even when they faced intense persecution they didn't give up they carried on knowing that persecution is something to be expected but not something that should cause us to stop doing your work and so Lord I pray for us in the same way that we model your that we would be humble that we would persevere that God we would be bold and compassionate as you've been to us and Lord ultimately that we would rejoice in seeing what you're doing through us and in your church and again Lord as always we pray that you would be pleased with what you see and you be glorified by all of it so help us Lord to be disciple

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makers and use us to advance your kingdom and to spread your gospel we ask these things in [40:03] Jesus name amen Thank you.

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