

**Theme:** As You Are Going: The Church on Mission (Mt 28:16-20)

**Title:** Report & Response- Acts 14:24-15:5

**Aim:** The imp of reporting what God is doing, whatever the response.

**Intro:** How many of you have ever been on a cruise? Some really enjoy cruises, whether it be to the Caribbean or Alaska or Prince Edward Island, etc. I understand that on a cruise you generally make several seaport-stops & may even take an incursion inland for a short spell, to see special sights. And you may even choose particular activities made available at those sights or onboard ship. Speak to Ted & Kelly, who are pros of sea-cruises. I've never been on a cruise unless you count the 3-hour tour on the Sea of Galilee. The apostle Paul, however, seemed to love cruises, since he went on at least 4 of them. For him, 3 were called missionary journeys & the 4<sup>th</sup> was headed to Rome to stand before Caesar as a prisoner. He & Barnabas didn't choose the "being worshipped as a god" activity they were offered. Nor did Paul choose the "being stoned" activity, but it was forced upon him. I don't think he enjoyed very much. What he did enjoy a great deal was the preaching the gospel activity & seeing many come to faith in Christ & the teaching activity. That was just on his 1<sup>st</sup> cruise/incursion/missionary journey. He & Barnabas were glad to tell others about their journey & encourage them to take the "cruise" as well. Theme: As you are going: the Church on mission. It is important as we are actively on mission for God that we report, knowing that the response will vary, as our text today shows us. Acts 14:24-15:5 [READ] I) **The Report** – Having been sent out by the church at Syrian Antioch, Barnabas & Saul (Paul), as you can see on this map, sailed to Cyprus, landing in Salamis & crossing the island to Paphos, preaching the gospel along the way. Then their "cruise" continued to Perga, in Pamphylia, then by land to Pisidian Antioch, then Iconium, Lystra & Derbe, then they reversed their steps & traveled back

to Lystra, Iconium & Pisidian Antioch. Luke recorded that they encouraged those who had come to faith “to continue in the faith,” even tho “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” They appointed elders/leaders in every church, committing them to the Lord. From there they went on to Perga, where they spoke the word, then they traveled the short distance to Attalia, where they pick up the cruise line again & sailed back Syrian Antioch. Note that Luke reminded his readers that it was from Antioch that Barnabas & Saul “had been commended to the grace of God for the work they had fulfilled.” They had been given over to God to lead them by His grace & use them in the work of the gospel. I believe it is clearly inferred that those Antioch believers had been praying for Barnabas & Saul for the whole time they were gone. That may well have been why they didn’t succumb to the temptation of being worshipped as gods. Certainly, that is why Paul did not die when he was stoned. God protected them in various ways And Luke clearly states that they had fulfilled/ accomplished the work to which God called them. We know Paul would have 2 more missionary journeys, but this 1<sup>st</sup> one was complete, even amid opposition. They weren’t finished what they were finished spreading the gospel, but had accomplished what they had set out to do. Like any good missionary, as soon as possible Paul & Barnabas “gathered the church together” & “declared to them all that God had done w/them, & how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.” Can’t you imagine the excitement of those in the Antioch Church to see their brothers again & Paul & Barnabas’ excitement to see their brothers/sisters again? Can you imagine the excitement they had to be able to tell them all that had happened? Note that they declared what God had done, not “what we have done;” how God “had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.” You & I need to always understand that when anyone comes to faith in Christ, even if we have the privilege to

introduce them to Christ, it is God doing the work, using the witnesses & opening hearts to the truth. God has been at work. God is the one who gives faith to believe. God deserves all the praise. Jesus saves, not Bruce Burks (nor you). We can only be channels of His love & grace, pointing others to Jesus, sharing the truth of the gospel as the Holy Spirit works thru us. So, like modern missionaries, w/out the slides, Paul & Barnabas reported to the church at Antioch. “You sent us forth by God’s leading, & here is what happened.” I’m sure they shared the good & the bad, & what mattered most of all, the beautiful results – lives touched for eternity. II) **The Response**. 1) Luke doesn’t actually say what the response of the Antioch church was, but we can easily surmise that they were overjoyed. By their obedience to God the Holy Spirit & their sending/supporting Paul & Barnabas, they had a part in what God had done – just as we have a part in what God is doing by our going day by day & thru the missionaries we support by prayer & finances; & thru the those of our church who have the privilege of helping others know Christ, as we pray for God to reach the lost. That’s why we must share those prayer requests & what God is actively doing. The Antioch church gladly had Paul & Barnabas stay for a while to rest & continue to talk about the great work of God. 2) Not all the response was positive. Some who traveled to Antioch from Judea (Luke says they “came down from Judea.” It’s north but Judea is at a higher altitude.), these Jewish believers (at least professed), responded by crying foul. They were teaching, “You’ve got to be circumcised according to the custom of Moses or you can’t be saved.” In their thinking, this would apply not only to those who believed under Paul & Barnabas’ ministry on their 1<sup>st</sup> missionary journey, but also to Gentile believers in Antioch & Cornelius & his friends in Capernaum. That’s quite a bold statement, which none of the apostles ever made. But it’s not entirely an outlandish statement. Up until those Gentile converts, every convert to Christ had been

Jewish, & all the men had been circumcised. It only made sense to them. They were unable to wrap their minds around being right w/God & not being circumcised, ritually Jewish, but it wasn't the gospel. Thruout the history of the Church there have been those who have insisted that faith in Christ is not enough. It wouldn't be stated that way, but many have espoused a "Jesus +" gospel. Jesus + baptism – baptism is very imp, but that doesn't save; it professes faith. Jesus + righteous/moral lifestyle – "don't smoke, don't chew, don't run w/those who do" – again, a righteous/moral lifestyle is important/good, but we're not saved by how we live, nor is our salvation sustained by how we live. A change in our lives/righteous living is an indication of salvation, not what saves us. Paul & Barnabas debated w/those who were espousing such misleading teaching. Luke said they "had no small dissension & debate." It seems they stood their ground – no compromise! So, the Antioch church (quite a bit the cog in the wheel of the Church at this point) wisely decided to send Paul, Barnabas & some others up to Jerusalem to question the apostles & church elders about this. They wanted to take it to the top. Even those Jewish believers respected those leaders. This decision wasn't for the sake of Paul & Barnabas but for the sake of the Church as a whole going forward. The life & unity of the Church was at stake. It's interesting that as they went, they had to travel thru Phoenicia & Samaria & along the way they shared w/the churches "in detail the conversion of the Gentiles." I think it's great that they took the time, on even such an important venture, to tell others what God had done. Whenever we experience God working in/thru us or others, we should take the opportunity to share w/others what God has done. It's not bragging when we humbly give God the glory & rejoice in Him. It's His work, not ours & it's a privilege to be used of God, in spite of ourselves. The response of these believers along the way was "great joy," as it should have been. The Church continued

to grow. The initial response of the church in Jerusalem & apostles & elders was to welcome Paul & Barnabas & those appointed to travel w/them. They listened to the report & also listened to the concern of some professed believers who were also Pharisees. Not sure if they continued to be Pharisees once they came to faith in Christ, or whether or not they were part of the group which had traveled to Antioch. They insisted that the Gentile converts to Christ must be circumcised & ordered to keep the law of Moses. It occurs to me that some churches even today look down on other churches because they don't worship/think exactly as they do (version of the Bible, music, what think of the Holy Spirit, etc.). That's tragic. There are core truths of the Church, the most significant being who Jesus is & what He has done for us. We need to gladly report what God is doing in our midst & elsewhere, & rejoice in Him, responding w/praise & prayer. This was a potential roadblock or a rocket boost for the young 1<sup>st</sup> century Church. What would they do? Tune in next week (or read the rest of chap15). As we are going, let us be a church on mission.