

# Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

## R<sub>2</sub>L – Resolved to Live: In Perseverance (Part 1)

Acts 14:1-3

*1 In Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and of Greeks. 2 But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren. 3 Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands.*

As many of you know, one of my favorite ministry verses is 1 Corinthians 15:58 which says,

***Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.***

This is a verse that says in effect, “Never give up, never stop doing, never give in, never give ground, never give over to excuses, but always, always continue, abound, persevere, press on and push relentlessly in the work of the Lord.” To say this verse another way, “Therefore, we should not be ruled by our changing emotions, but firmly grounded in the truth, unchangeable and uncompromising even in our own thinking, not erratic and scatterbrained, not easily discouraged by hang ups and setbacks, but fully resolved to do God’s work daily, knowing that the Lord Himself will make such work profitable.” (Whew!)

I said that this is one of my favorite ministry verses. This does not mean that it is a verse for pastors alone. It is not a pastoral verse at all, but a congregational verse. If you consider for a moment and answer the question, who wrote this verse? You answer, “The apostle Paul!” Yes, a man who has a pastor’s heart. And to whom did Paul write these words? You answer, “To the entire congregation of the church at Corinth!” Yes, this is a call to a church to persevere, to keep going, to diligently labor - - - but labor in what? According to this verse, we are to labor or persevere in **“the work of the Lord.”** But just what is the work of the Lord that the Holy Spirit called the church at Corinth and to which He calls our church?

In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul calls the church to the work of proclaiming the foolishness of the cross; foolishness to those who are perishing, but “to us who are being saved, it is the power of God” (1:18). The church is called to proclaim, to speak of and about the power of the cross, the wonder of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross to save sinners. And this is same call that Jesus placed upon His disciples in the book of Acts in familiar words of Acts 1:8, **“but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses...”** The one fundamental purpose of the church, and therefore, the one fundamental purpose to which each member of the church is called is to be a witness for Christ, to tell other of what He has done to save sinners. This is in part, the “work of the Lord” to which we are called to persevere. It is something that each one of us who has spent any time in church knows; we are supposed to tell others about Jesus. But sometimes knowing and doing are not the same, isn’t that right? It is hard to keep going, particularly if things are difficult.

And the question for us this morning is this, “How can I persevere when I feel like quitting?” We find the answer to this question here in Acts 14. In these verses we are presented not so much with the “how” to become a Christian, but rather with what does it look like if you truly are a Christian.

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Now we are going to take this chapter in a few parts as Acts 14 traces the remainder of Paul’s first missionary journey through Iconium, Lystra, Derbe and then back to Antioch, Syria. Now one of things emphasized by Luke in this chapter is of the perseverance of Paul and Barnabas to preach the gospel even in the face of opposition and difficulty. This, then, is a message about what ought to be true of our lives if we *are* Christians; of that in which we must persevere and that is the constant proclaiming of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

So I am laying some groundwork for us as we prepare to see what lessons can be learned about being resolved to live in perseverance. This morning I would have us look at something in this whole chapter that is clearly an emphasis of Luke; it is something that Luke wanted his reader to catch. As I said just a moment ago, we find Paul preaching the gospel in the face of opposition and difficulty. Beloved, this is the work of the Lord, to speak of the gospel to others regardless of opposition or obstacles. And what I want to spend some time on this morning are the four words used by Luke in this text to describe the work of the Lord, a work that we see Paul and Barnabas committed to – which is being a witness, telling others about the person and work of Jesus. It is my prayer that by going through these four words, we can gain a greater appreciation and knowledge of our part in being witnesses for Jesus.

First, in verse 1 we read, **“In Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together and spoke in such a manner...”** The word **“spoke”** in the Greek is **“laleo”** [λαλεω] which means “to talk, to tell, to speak, or to preach” It is a word used again in verse 9, as Paul “spoke” to the crowd and specifically to the lame man; and again in verse 25 in speaking to the people of Perga. In each case, what was spoken was “the Word” of God, the gospel. We are to speak forth the word of God. It is our responsibility if we would be witnesses for Jesus Christ. But that is not all that is said here. It is one thing to speak, or to tell people something, but the clear indication of verse one is that Paul spoke in such a manner as to elicit a response. What was that response in verse one? The response was that **“a large number of people believed, both of Jews and Greeks.”** This is rather exciting, for if we could just know in what manner Paul spoke, we might be able to expect others to believe, right? If we could just speak with the same eloquence, the same persuasiveness, the same logic, then people might believe us as they did Paul right? Well, Paul would disagree. Listen to his own testimony in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 where we read,

**1 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, 4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.**

Paul is clear that any power that came with his preaching was not his own, but came from the Lord. Anyone who preaches so that his message can be praised, and anyone who gets lost in the craftiness and skill of the preacher will wind up with his or her faith not in Jesus, but in the talent of the preacher. In such a case it will not be long before such a one would soon be looking for someone who can preach better. But Paul did not preach in such a manner that their faith

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would rest on the wisdom of men. He wanted their faith to be rooted and grounded in the power of God.

And so, in our text, as Paul spoke in such a manner that the many believed, we can be sure that this was not merely the result of Paul’s brilliant effort. And we need to remember this when we would speak of Jesus. Our responsibility is to speak; and we ought to speak in such a manner that can be clearly understood; but I would ask, in what manner did Paul speak? And if the answer is, by Paul’s own testimony, not merely in his ability to speak, then what was it? I believe the answer to that question lies in the verses that come before as well as after our text.

Look at the closing statement of Acts 13. Remember that Paul and Barnabas had been preaching the gospel to the nearly the whole city of Pisidian, Antioch in south-central Asia Minor. So many Gentiles flooded the synagogue there to hear and believe in Jesus that the Jew got mad and incited a riot to drive Paul and Barnabas out of the city. But notice how Acts 13 closes there in verse 58, **“And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”** As Paul and Barnabas made their way to Iconium, there were continually filled with what? With joy, the blessed peace and assurance of God’s presence, and with the Holy Spirit. What makes any gospel message understood by a person? Is it the eloquence of the preacher? No! To be sure, the Holy Spirit uses the words of men, but it is the Holy Spirit of God that causes the unbeliever to understand the word of God. This was Paul’s testimony in 1 Corinthians 2:11-14

**11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, 13 which things we also speak [λογεοι], not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. 14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.**

Beloved, the manner in which Paul spoke the message of Jesus was not in his own power, but in the power of the Spirit of God. If we would persevere in proclaiming Jesus, as a church we must become the very place where the Spirit of God manifests Himself by teaching us and revealing to us the truth of Jesus. The manner in which we are to speak the gospel is according to the very power and purpose of the Spirit. Beloved, according to John 16:14, the Spirit of God always glorifies Jesus always points people to Jesus; and takes of that which belongs to Jesus, the truth of who He is and what He has done, and makes it known to others. This is the manner in which Paul spoke the gospel to those in Iconium. This is how we are to speak the gospel to others; filled with the Spirit, pointing people to Jesus, declaring simply who He is and what He has done.

But Luke does not see fit to use only the word *“laleo”* – to speak in describing how Paul perseveres in the work of the Lord. In verse three we read, **“Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord...”** The word for **“speaking boldly”** here is hard to pronounce in the Greek, *“parrhesiazomai”* [παρρησιάζομαι] but its meaning is rich. It means, “to be frank or forthright in utterance; to be clear and confident in speech; to say something with complete boldness and assurance.” Again, would you notice the human

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responsibility. Paul and Barnabas spoke how? They spoke boldly, with confidence. Paul was not ashamed of the truth of the gospel, but rather was forthright, outright, and visible. Why would anyone believe in the power of God to change a heart and save a soul if it did not also make the transformed person speak with confidence of what his God had done. If we do not desire to confidently tell others who Jesus is and what Jesus has done, then we might question if we really understand who Jesus is and what he has done. We have a responsibility to tell others about Jesus. Remember the word of Christ in Mark 8:38

***For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.***

We have the right and responsibility to speak boldly the truth about Jesus. But just like what we read in verse one, the human responsibility, here to speak boldly, is couple with divine involvement. Notice what our text says, they were **“speaking boldly...”** how? **“...with reliance upon the Lord.”** If we would persevere in the work of the Lord to proclaim who Jesus is and what He has done for sinners, it must be **“with reliance upon the Lord.”** Literally the text reads that they were **“speaking boldly upon the Lord.”** The word “upon” is the Greek preposition “epi” [ἐπί]. Perhaps a better way to put it is that they were speaking boldly, “resting” upon the Lord; as that is what the word *epi* means here; to rest; or to have as one’s sure foundation. These men could speak boldly the truths about Jesus because they rested on the Lord. This is why Paul could command, “always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.” If you would speak the gospel, trusting, relying, depending upon God for the results, then you know that whether God uses your words to bring people to faith, as in verse one, or to violence as in verse two, you know that God is working.

And so, just like in verse one where there is the responsibility to speak, but to speak in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit; here in verse three we have the responsibility to speak, but to speak in dependence and faith in the Lord and what He will accomplish.

Evidently these two words are not enough for Luke as he used a third word to describe this work of the Lord as found in verses 7 and 21. In verse 7 we read, **“and there they continued to preach the gospel.”** And in verse 21 we read, **“After they had preached the gospel to that city...”** The word “preach” is “*euaggelizo*” [εὐαγγελίζω] in the Greek. It means “to evangelize or to announce the good news. It speaks of declaring, often publically, the message of the gospel. Luke likes this word as he uses it in Luke 2:8-11, the familiar Christmas story:

***8 In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. 10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news [εὐαγγελίζω] of great joy which will be for all the people; 11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.***

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Here is a very public declaration of who Jesus is; he is Christ the Lord; and of what He will do; He is to be the Savior; the Deliverer. Beloved, what do we need to tell people about Jesus. What is the good news? If the angel was correct, then people need to know that Jesus both Lord and Savior; that He is God in the flesh come to deliver us from our sins.

In both verses 7 and 21, there is a sense of perseverance in the proclaiming of this good news. Do you see that? In verse 7 it says that they “continued” to preach the gospel. They did not stop preaching, even though, as we will look at more closely next week, they were being plotted against with an attempt to kill them. And in verse 21, they, after being persecuted in Lystra, preached the gospel, proclaimed the good news until many disciples were made. Beloved, we must be resolve to speak, to boldly proclaim, to herald the good news regardless of how people respond.

But there is a **fourth** and final word used by Luke in this chapter that points to Paul and Barnabas’ resolve to persevere in the work of the Lord. After their two year journey, when all they might have wanted to do was rest, we read of what they did in 28, **“When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all the things God had done with them....”**

The word “report” is *“anaggello”* [αναγγέλλω] in the Greek. If you think you think you might be hearing something that sounds like angel, that is because the root of this word, *“angellos”* is the Greek word for angel. An angel is a messenger and *“anaggello”* means “to announce or declare as a messenger.” More literally, it means to “bring back word as a messenger or reporter.” The idea is almost like a reenactment of the events. In fact the KJV translates it this way, saying,

***And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.***

Notice that there is a responsibility to not only tell unbelievers the gospel, as seen in the three previous words Luke used; but also to come together and to reenact or rehearse the gospel among believers. We need to learn from one another’s experiences. And just what needs to be reenacted or rehearsed? The two things that the church needs to know are, **“all that God had done with them”** and **“how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles” (or to unbelievers).**

When it comes to the work of the Lord, we can so often get distracted with talking to others about life, politics, sports, and even differing theology. These are issues for another setting perhaps with family, friends or co-workers. But in the church there are only two things to report:

**First**, what God has done – how we or people we have talked to have benefited from God’s presence among them, how God’s name has been honored, how lives have been changed, even if it is only our own hearts that life God has changed...

**Second**, how God has opened a door of faith – how people’s hearts are opening up to the gospel message we are sharing, how the gospel is gaining creditability, how faith is growing, again, even if it is only our own faith that has grown!

Beloved, we need to report on how God is working in our lives to one another. We may feel that if these are the only two things we can report then we would have nothing to say! But I know that God is at work even when we do not always recognize it. This is why we need to

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rehearse it, to practice it, to speak it out for others to hear; to learn and to grow in their abilities to share the gospel. Let us be wary of being so focused on ourselves that we fail to recognize what God is actually doing among us! For when we focus on what God is doing among us, then we tell, we will speak boldly, we will proclaim the good news to others; and then we will come together and report on all the things God has done; to His glory, to the exaltation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and to the building of His Church.

This is our work of the Lord! To this I ask you, are you steadfast, immovable and always abounding in the work of the Lord? If not, why not? Are you a believer and simply have not been trusting the Lord? Then repent and ask God to change your heart? Are you not yet saved but realize you need to trust in the Lord, to call upon the name of the Lord to save you; to change you and give you the desire to do His work, for His glory and to your own delight? Then pray to Him and ask Him right now to change your heart; tell Him you long to trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior; and plead with Him that by His grace, you would be enabled to serve Him.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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