
Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

R₂L – Resolved to Live: In Perseverance

Acts 14:1-7

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.

Let me start this morning by stating a truly obvious reality - everyone has problems. Right? There is not one of us in here, with the exception of perhaps the youngest among us, that has not been discouraged, disheartened, disillusioned and sometimes just left to feel emotionally beat up. Am I right? Some of you have heard me tell this story before because it is one of my favorites. It is the account of one Chippy the Parakeet. It is a true story that ran in a small town newspaper. I believe it describes the way we sometimes feel:

Chippy the parakeet never saw it coming. One second he was peacefully perched in his cage. The next he was sucked in, washed up, and blown over. The problems began when Chippy's owner decided to clean his cage with a vacuum cleaner. She removed the attachment from the end of the hose and stuck it in the cage. The phone rang, and she turned to pick it up. She'd barely said 'hello' when 'ssshwoopp!' Chippy got sucked in.

The bird owner gasped, put down the phone, turned off the vacuum, and opened the bag. There was Chippie-- still alive, but stunned. Since the bird was covered with dust and soot, she grabbed him and raced to the bathroom, turned on the faucet, and held Chippie under the running water. Then, realizing that Chippie was soaked and shivering, she did what any compassionate bird owner would do . . she reached for the hair dryer and blasted the pet with hot air. "Poor Chippie never knew what hit him.

A few days after the trauma, the reporter who had initially written about the event contacted Chippy's owner to see how the bird was recovering. 'Well,' she replied, 'Chippy doesn't sing much anymore he just sits and stares.'

It's hard not to see why. Sucked in, washed up, and blown over . . . that's enough to steal the song from the stoutest heart. Can you relate to Chippy? Most of us can. One minute you're seated in familiar territory with a song on your lips, then . . . The pink slip comes. The rejection letter arrives. The doctor calls. The divorce papers are delivered. The check bounces. A policeman knocks on your door. And Ssshwoopp! You're sucked into a black cavern of doubts, doused with the cold water of reality, and stung with the hot air of empty promises. The life that had been so calm is now so stormy. You're hail-stormed by demands. Assailed by doubts. Pummeled by questions. And somewhere in the trauma, you lose your joy. Somewhere in the storm, you lose your song. Have you ever found yourself in such a storm of life?]¹ If so, if you can relate to Chippy, then you can begin to understand a bit of what had taking place here in Acts 14. There is a lesson that we need to learn; that no matter what this life may throw at us; we can always come back with the joy of the Lord and a song of praise in our hearts; not because we are so resilient, but because the Lord has promised to accomplish His work through those who are resolved to live the Christian life no matter what gets thrown at us!

Paul and Barnabas might have felt like Chippy; sucked in, washed out and blown over. Just back in chapter 13, they had been violently driven out of Antioch Pisidian. So now they are heading south and east and arriving in a town called Iconium. In 14:1 one we see them doing

¹ Adapted from IN THE EYE OF THE STORM, by Max Lucado

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what would become their custom; of going first to the synagogue to proclaim the gospel, the message of Jesus Christ; to the Jews. You might remember back in Acts 13:46, Paul had said that they were turning to the Gentiles to preach. This did not mean they would give up on preaching to the Jews, but that they realized their focus was going to be on non-Jewish peoples. They did not abandon the Jews just because they were generally more resistant; they first went to the synagogue.

What did they do when they entered the synagogue? Verse one tells us that they **“spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and Greeks.”** Even though other speakers may have become timid and fearful because of the mob experienced back in Antioch, Pisidian, Paul and Barnabas continued to speak the message of the gospel. This is the lesson for us; *to be resolved to live in perseverance, with a “I will press on for the glory of Christ regardless of what others think” mentality.*

As we work through our text, I would have you see that wherever they went, whatever the crowd, in the face of any circumstances, Paul and Barnabas were faithful to proclaim Jesus. This is the challenge for you and me; will we be faithful and persevere for Jesus; that wherever we are and in the face of any crowd we will be faithful witnesses? Our text reveals this faithful perseverance as Paul and Barnabas travel to Iconium, the focus of our attention this morning, and then and to Lystra and beyond, which we will pick up later.

Perseverance in Iconium (1-7)

The city of Iconium was located about 100 miles southeast of Antioch. The city sat as a key crossroads in the central plain of the province of Galatia. Let us walk through the account step by step.

I. Entered as Outcasts and Out-laws (14:1-5)

First, I would have you see how Paul and Barnabas enter the city. Literally, they were outcasts and like out-laws on the run. As we noted at the end of chapter 13, they had just been run out of Pisidian Antioch upon to coming to Iconium. What happened as they arrived in this new area? Let us read beginning in verse 1, reading through verse 5:

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. 4 But the people of the city were divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles. 5 And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them,

There is a deliberate pattern here of how Paul and Barnabas sought to reach the people with the gospel. I see five steps that we would do well to remember.

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Step #1: We must make contact (1a)

In Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together...

As had been their custom, they entered first into the synagogue. Why would they go to the synagogue? Have you ever thought about that? What do you find in a synagogue? Beloved, you find people! The point is that they went to where the people were. We can have no impact without contact. *[slide xx]* If we would share the gospel, we must share our lives, we must make contact with people. Do you seek to be around people so that you might intentionally speak to them about Jesus? This was the pattern of Paul. There is a second step...

Step #2: We must communicate the Word (1b).

[they] spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed...

We looked at this last week considering the question, in what manner did they speak that was so effective? From verse 52 of chapter 13 we know that their speaking was filled with the Holy Spirit and because the Holy Spirit points people to Jesus (John 16:14), it is safe to assume that they proclaimed similar truths as they had in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch. Mostly likely they used the Old Testament to lay a foundation and then told them about its fulfillment in Messiah Jesus. They communicated then the gospel, the message about Jesus, the truths of the Bible, in dependence and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Notice that they went to the people, that they spoke, that they were prepared to engage people for Jesus. As those who believe so thoroughly in the sovereignty of God in salvation, that it is God who chooses by His good grace who will be saved, we must yet beware of any attitude that thinks we, as His witnesses and messengers, do not have to be prepared and plan to communicate God's truth. We must not avoid preparation thinking we can just dump random truths on people and say, “It doesn't matter because God will do what God intends to do regardless of what I do.” To be sure, God will save His people, but let us never forget that God has ordained not only the **end**, the salvation of His people, but also the **means**, that it is through His people faithfully speaking His truth to others.

Beloved, God has commanded us to make disciples, to preach the gospel, to call people to repent and turn to God. If we are to do this, we must know His Word; we must know our audience; and we must know how to connect the two. I will share things about Jesus in one way to a five year old and a different way to a fifty year old. But in either case, the goal is the same; to tell them about Jesus. And I need to be prepared for either presentation. For Paul, the effect of his message was evident; ***“a large number of people believed...”*** Our purpose in talking to people about Jesus is not getting them to agree with what we are saying, but rather to see genuine, life-changing belief in the person and work of Jesus! We must communicate the Word. Then step three...

Step #3: We must know there will be conflict (2).

But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren.

Yes, a large number of people believed; but not everyone was so enthusiastic for Jesus. The Jews, who rejected Paul's teaching, sought to muddy the waters of the minds of the Gentiles. We read that there were some of the Jews who “stirred up the minds” – the idea here is shaking somebody from a dead sleep to get them up. How do you feel when you are rudely awakened? Well, you might feel like the next description in our text...embittered! The word “embittered”

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means “to poison”. These Jews sought to poison their minds with false teachings, misrepresentations, and with character assassination.

Sometimes we can act so surprised when people do not respond favorably to what we say about Jesus, or about living by the Bible, but if we remember that unbelievers are blinded by Satan, who disguised as an angel of light, duping people into spiritual complacency and apathy; and as such that we are engaged in a war for their souls, then the conflict will be expected. So, it will come, and if we are not expecting it, we can feel at times sucked in, washed out and blown over. So what are we to do? This leads to the fourth step...

Step #4: We must be committed to the long haul (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.

Something captured my attention in verse three. How long did they stay in Iconium? Did they run? No, rather they “**spent a long time there.**” How long? We are not told exactly. It could have been weeks or months, but whatever it was, they did not shrink back but continued to speak boldly about Jesus.

Many of us might have responded very differently, right? If we were to take the gospel to group of people who began to attack us, what would be our first inclination? “Run for your life!?” Paul and Barnabas stayed. This teaches us something important about communicating Jesus. It takes time to grow disciples, true followers of Jesus. Ministry, our service to God, is so much more than sharing some tracts about Jesus, or organizing a big name speaker to come for a three day conference. We can do that, but what wins the most people over is the consistent, bold proclamation of God’s Word by God’s people. I love how Paul described this to the Thessalonians. In 1 Thessalonians 2:8 he said,

Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.

As we noted before, to share the gospel effectively with others is to share your life. And often times it takes time for others to see the impact of the gospel on your life so that they can believe that the same gospel can impact their lives. I fear that we miss out on much spiritual fruit because we give up too quickly. Too often we want to be sniper assassin witnesses, hiding in some protected hideaway, looking at others through a narrow scope, hoping we can hit them with just one shot. Have you ever notice that most armies are not made up of snipers, but of soldiers who are engaged in the trenches, face to face, engaged in hand to hand combat. God is looking for soldiers who are in for the long haul commitment. Now some of you may be thinking, “I can hardly keep myself together from day to day and now you are telling me that God wants me to have this long term commitment? I don’t know if I have it in me? I have been sucked in, washed out, and blown over too many times! How can I be so resolved?” Glad you asked...

Step #5: We must rely on the Lord in the combat (4-5).

4 But the people of the city were divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles. 5 And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them...

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Do not read this glibly. There is a shock factor here. The faithful and committed Paul and Barnabas, seeking to do the Lord’s work, seeking to help people, desiring for them to have the assurance of heaven, these “good” men were being plotted against by the people in order to be mistreated and killed! Not just killed, but first mistreated; that is abused, to humiliate and shame by violence; made to hurt...and then they would kill them. This is not just the desire of one or two people but nearly half of a city!

Let me make an observation here. Be careful as you hear what I am about to say. *A Christian that does nothing to advance the kingdom of Christ does not need to worry about spiritual combat.* Some will think, “Oh...good advice pastor! I will just do nothing!” *A Christian that does nothing to advance the kingdom of Christ does not need to worry about spiritual combat.* Such a one will not experience opposition. Why is that? Because Satan is clever and efficient and will not waste his time on those soldiers who are A.W.O.L. (absent without leave).

But get on the front lines, start to share the plan of salvation with others and the heat of battle will come to you! When the battles come, you might be tempted to stop. So what keeps you going? The very thing that kept Paul going. We must rely on the Lord, **“with reliance in the Lord”** - that is resting, trusting in and on the Lord to do His work through the words you speak. In short, we must be resolved to live in perseverance, faithful to keep speaking about Jesus.

II. Exited as Outcasts and Outlaws (14:6-7)

So first, they entered Iconium as outcasts and out-laws and notice **second** how they left the city in verses 6-7...as outcasts and out-laws.

6 they became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region; 7 and there they continued to preach the gospel.

Notice that they did not leave because of the verbal abuse they receive in verse 2. Rather they left why? For fear of death as noted in verse 5. Luke records that they did not simply leave but rather they **“fled”** – they ran for their lives. The word “fled” literally means “to be down with running.” Paul looked at Barnabas as said, “They are going to stone us to death if we stay, I think we should run.” And Barnabas said, “I am down with that!” Okay...not really, but they knew that to remain would cost their lives and there were other peoples that needed to hear the gospel.

Now think about this; they had been violently chased out of two cities; Antioch and now Iconium. Their track record seems to be 0 or 2. So, what did they do? Did they give up? They just kept going! They persevered, knowing they had been called to tell people about Jesus. The text gives no indication that they were scared, that they were running like whipped dogs with their tails between their legs, rather they proceeded into the next region do what? To preach the gospel, speaking the very same message that got them into trouble in the first two towns.

There is a lesson in this; a reminder that if there is anyone most enabled to be optimistic about life, it is the person who believes in the sovereignty of God for salvation. Why, because the results of who is saved is up to God, it is God who saves and all He asks of us as His people is to tell people the truth about who Jesus is and what Jesus has accomplished for us on the cross. And what die Jesus accomplish? He secured our reconciliation, peace with God. And if would but believe that we are at odds with God because of our sin and deserve to die, but that God has

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given us a great Savior in Jesus Christ, who not only takes our punishment on the cross but makes us fit for heaven by His own righteousness, we are saved and transformed.

Have you ever wondered why people get angry or put out by such a message? Beloved, no one likes being told they are wrong. No one likes being told that what they believe or how they believe cannot promise them true purpose in this life or the hope of eternal life. No one likes being told that they are responsible to someone else, namely a Creator! And so, when you start rocking someone’s life foundation, they will often come out fighting, partly because of the hardness of heart, partly because there is a sense of embarrassment for being duped for so long.

We need to remember that just because someone gets upset about having their beliefs and practices challenged by the truth of God’s word is no reason to give up. We are fighting for the souls of men and women. We are engaged in a battle with a clever and crafty enemy who not only wants to keep spiritual blinders on unbelievers, but who also wants to intimidate believers into silence. Thus, if you are silent, it is in part because you are listening to the lies of the devil rather than obeying and trusting the purpose and command of the Lord for your life. Therefore, let me remind you of a couple of things as we close. If we would be resolved to live this faithful life of perseverance, then...

1. We must remember that we will not be able to avoid conflict.

It is interesting to note that Paul and Barnabas did not see opposition as something strange. Ministry, serving God is filled with ups and downs. People can become a great source of joy as they grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus; when a couple comes together in the name of Jesus be married and start a family for the glory of God; and even in the death of a beloved saint, there is the joy of knowing his status in the presence of God and that we will see one another again. But people can also be a great source of anguish; those who oppose and criticize what you do or who you are; those who walk with you for a time, then depart; those who do not want to hear what you have to say and attack your character. Such things happened to Paul and Barnabas and it was not an evidence of God’s displeasure or that they had done something wrong. Rather, they had come they expected it. How do I know this? Notice verse 22 where Paul, coming back to Iconium, says to the believers there, says, **“Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”** If this be true, then we ought to expect the same even today; if we are speaking to people about Jesus, some will oppose us. The Scriptures are clear, we cannot avoid conflict.

Like the door-to-door salesman, the believer who takes his love of the gospel and of Jesus out into the world must expect plenty of rebuffs and opposition. Why? Because the gospel does not claim to be simply relatively true, that is “It feels good to me, but everybody has his own way of seeing things”. Rather, the gospel claims to be absolutely and universally true. Even worse, as far as most people see it, Christianity, as a religious system claims to be exclusively true. This is offensive in our pluralistic, democratic, anything goes age. The mantra of, “Everyone has a right to believe whatever they like about God!” is recited to us constantly. Beloved, this is not the point; for the right to believe anything one wants does not mean that what that someone believes is true. The pages of the New Testament show us Christians who responded to the objections and challenges of unbelievers with a clear communication of what is the truth and of what is the faith. The early Christians pressed the claims of truth and were able to defend them, clearly setting the truth of Christ in opposition to the false ideas which contradict it. And they did this whether they

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were formerly fishermen, tax-collectors, or academic students of the law. They “took it to the streets.” And so should we!

Consider the teaching of Jesus, one acquainted with rebuffs and opposition:

Matthew 10:34-39

34 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 "For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; 36 and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD. 37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 "He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.

And then, in another circumstance, we find Jesus teaching...

Luke 14:25-27

25 Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, 26 "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. 27 "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

In comparison for one's love and desire to do God's will, all other relationships, all other pursuits would seem as things hated. Such attitudes will sometimes bring hardship and conflict, especially as we tell others about salvation in Jesus. We cannot avoid conflict...so what do we do?

2. We must resolve daily to persevere and keep doing what God has commanded.

As we have already seen and will see again when we pick up Acts 14 in a couple weeks is that although their locations changed, the focus of Paul and Barnabas remained the same; the mission was always the same. Someone aptly said, “Never doubt in the darkness what God has shown you in the light.” When the conflict and opposition comes, we must go back and rehearse the instructions given us by our Commander-in-Chief. When the going gets tough...that is the perfect time to be all the more resolved, all the more determined to keep doing what God has commanded us, pleading in prayer for the grace, the strength, and the perseverance to please Him. Now is not the time of giving up. I know that some of you may feel like you have been sucked in, washed out and blown over; but unlike poor Chippy, you **do** have a song to sing; the gospel of Jesus Christ, and you **must** to sing.

If we are honest with ourselves, many times, too many times, we have felt as though we cannot sing anymore. Kent Hughes describes what happened to one servant of God who decided he had enough. He writes,

“Some onlookers thought it was unusual, but few noticed when the pastor wheeled into the church parking lot in a borrowed pickup truck. But everyone's eyes were upon him when he backed the truck across the lawn to his study door. Refusing comment or assistance, he began to empty his office onto the truck bed. He was impassive and systematic: first the desk drawers,

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then the files, and last his library of books, which he tossed carelessly into a heap, many of them flopping askew like slain birds. His task done, the pastor left the church and, as was later learned, drove some miles to the city dump where he committed everything to the waiting garbage. It was his way of putting behind him the overwhelming sense of failure and loss that he had experienced in the ministry. This young, gifted pastor was determined never to return to the ministry. Indeed, he never did.”

The truth is, this happens more than we care to admit and not just pastors; too many Christians have abandon their posts. This is why we need to keep the model of Paul before us continually. We must...

1. Make contact with people
2. Communicate God’s Word
3. Know there will be conflict
4. Be committed for the long haul
5. Rely on the Lord in the combat

It is possible to endure hardship. It is possible to be as 1 Corinthians 15:58 calls us to **“be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.”** We can make it when the going gets rough. But it takes perseverance and reliance upon the Lord. Will you resolve to be steadfast in the Lord?

Soli Deo Gloria

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