

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

R₂L – Resolved to Live: With a High View of the Church

Acts 14:21-28

1 After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22 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." 23 When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. 24 They passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia. 25 When they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.

We have been making our way through Acts chapter 14, which is Luke's account of Paul's first missionary journey. We have been tracing the routes that Paul and Barnabas took as they left the church in Antioch Syria, traveled across the Mediterranean Sea to Cyprus, and then headed up north to Asia Minor, modern day Turkey, where they preach the gospel in a number of cities. As we have noted, wherever they preached the gospel at least two things happened. One, there were those who responded to the gospel and were saved. But two, wherever they preached the gospel, they ran into opposition. All of this reminds us that when the gospel is *rightly* proclaimed, there will be people who respond with antagonism, or even with hostility. That ought not to surprise us.

But one of the things I would have you notice; something that ought to strike us as we come to the final verses of Acts 14, and the conclusion of this first missionary journey, is the *motivation* of Paul and Barnabas. I mean it is one thing for a person to invest himself in an endeavor, as Paul and Barnabas have invested themselves in this missionary journey; but it is completely other thing, and requires a completely different motivation to not only endure the rigorous hardships of traveling by foot from town to town in order to tell people about Jesus; but then to go right back into the places of opposition, and antagonism, and even the death threats; being chased out of towns for fear of your life; to have the audacity, the wherewithal, the inclination, and some might even daresay the stupidity of saying to yourself, “I think we need to go back to the very places where our lives were threatened, where the people are lying in wait to discredit us into destroying us.” Who says that?

Let me ask you, if you were to pursue a project at work, or maybe you were pursuing a particular relationship or friendship, or maybe you received a letter from the IRS and had to provide some documentation for a tax credit you received; if you had any opposition at all in any one of those scenarios, if your boss said to you, “What are you thinking by pursuing such a project?”; or the person with whom you are pursuing this friendship with says, “I don't have anything to do with someone like you”; or you provided the necessary documentation to the IRS and you haven't heard from them and so your mindset is, “I will let sleeping dogs lie!”; who on earth is going to put themselves back into those situations? And not one of those compares to what Paul and Barnabas are doing here in our text in verses 21-28. Paul and Barnabas are determined to go back to the very cities where the majority of the people hated them. And we must ask ourselves, “Why?”

Last week I offered you an answer to that question. What is it that motivated Paul and Barnabas to do what they did as seen in our text? Their motivation is revealed because they valued at least three things above all else; three things that governed their thinking in such a way

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that it did not matter to them if it was a threat to their lives. The Puritan Richard Baxter once said, “Screw the truth into men’s minds.” And so that we might have it ingrained upon our own minds, that it might begin to have an effect upon our own hearts, so that it might have an impact upon the very way that we live let me remind you again of the very three things that motivated Paul and Barnabas in pursuing this rather antagonistic ministry. First, they had a high view of God. These men knew who God was, what he was like, of man’s position before this great God, and what God has done to make peace between Himself and man.

We also know that they had a high view of Scripture, the word of God, and they unashamedly went from town to town, placed the place, literally at times from person to person, using the Scriptures as they pointed people to the reality of who Jesus is and calling them to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior.

But that is not all that they valued. By the very virtue of this first missionary journey, and notice I said first missionary journey, as there would be at least two more recorded for us here in the book of Acts; these men demonstrated with their very lives that they had a high view of the church. These men regarded the church as something worthy to be initiated from town to town, as they started churches. These men regarded the church as something worthy to invest themselves in, as they went back strengthening the souls of the saints, and encouraging them in their faith, and committing them to God. Paul captures this idea of investing oneself in the church when he wrote the letter to the Thessalonians. Listen to what he said to the church in Thessalonica,

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. (1 Thessalonians 2:5)

For Paul, and since Paul said that we are to imitate him as he imitates Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1), to be part of the church, part of the body of Christ is more than just sharing some verses about who Jesus is but it is also about investing regularly, candidly, intimately in other believers’ lives. What motivated Paul and Barnabas in going back to the cities where they had just started churches, even in the light of fierce opposition, was his high regard, this great love, their sense of a great calling to give themselves to the church so that it could be built up in the faith, all to the glory of God.

If we be Christians, if we take on the name of Christ, we should expect from one another nothing less than this increasing attitude of loving the church as Paul and Barnabas loved the church. But of course I could go one step further, and perhaps some of you know where I’m going when I say this, but the greatest example of one who love the church is found in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ who gave His life for the church; gave His life so that you and I could be the family of God, gave His life that we (you and I) could invest in one another’s lives because we know Christ has first invested in us.

So we see in our text Paul and Barnabas going back to these churches that they had started, in cities where they had experienced tribulations all because they had a great love for the church. But the question for us is this, “What does such a love for the church look like?” What does such a love accomplish? Our text helps us answer these questions. For at the very heart of our text, we see Paul having such an affection for the church and these young believers, that he

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knew he had to go back and invest some more into their lives. And then as our text progresses we see that Paul and Barnabas will take what they had learned on this first missionary journey all the way back to those more mature, or seasoned believers there in the church at Antioch, Syria so that their own faith may be strengthened.

Last week we divided this text into two key points; first, we notice that young believers need the local church. We see this in verses 21-25. This is where we spent most of the time last week and I intend to review these points with you and add a few more thoughts. Under this first point, that young believers need the local church, we divided this up further into two sections first noting that as believers we must resolve to lead people to and then lead them to open a Christ. In verse 21 Paul and Barnabas first lead people to Christ by preaching the gospel, telling the people about Jesus. And then further along in verse 21 we noted that as believers we must teach people to follow Jesus, as it says in our text that both Paul and Barnabas **“had made many disciples.”** We ought not ever be content with simply telling people about Jesus, our goal is to see people follow Jesus. We must be resolved to lead people to and lead them to obey Christ.

In addition to this resolve, we noted secondly that we must resolve to connect people to the body of Christ. We see this beginning in the second half of verse 21 and running to verse 25. In these verses we see that there are five things necessary for young believers to continue in the faith. It is a little bit misleading to say that these five things are only for young believers, as they are true for every believer, but they must be impressed upon a young believer, so that he or she knows he is connected or she is connected to the church. What are those five things? The first three are by way of review:

1. Believers need strengthening (14:22a)

We see this at the beginning of verse 22 where our text tells us that upon Paul and Barnabas’ return to the cities that their ministry was that of **“strengthening the souls of the disciples...”** Paul and Barnabas wanted these new believers to be strong in the Lord and they knew that strength in the Lord came from being gathered together hearing the word of God. So they brought them together for that purpose.

2. Believers need encouraging (14:22b)

We see this in the second half of verse 22 where it says that Paul and Barnabas, in addition to strengthening the souls of the saints, also spent their time **“encouraging them to continue in the faith...”** The idea here is of coming alongside these believers, investing time in them, so that they would know the content of what they believe, that is their faith.

3. Believers need leadership (14:23a)

Then, in verse 23 we see that Paul and Barnabas, **“had appointed elders for them in every church...”** Paul’s priority was to train leaders so that the people that had come to Christ under his preaching would continue to follow Christ when he had left. This is truly the goal of every spiritual leader, to strengthen and encourage people to continue hard in following Christ even when they are not present. You all can come to church and put on the spiritual face, but I am more concerned about your spiritual face the other six days of the week when I do not see you. The church needs accountability, spiritual leaders who will ask you, “How is your faith?” We need leaders who can give direction, guidance, counseling, and exhortation where exhortation is

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needed. Beloved, *the church is not the church without spiritual leadership*. If you are not seeking to be connected to your spiritual leaders, then your view of the church is diminished. If you attend a church where spiritual leaders do not desire to invest themselves in the lives of the people, then there is a diminished view of the church. Believers need leadership. But it does not all fall on the leaders. Did you know that *you* have a very specific call in the word of God to pursue spiritual leaders in your church? Did you know it to be *your* obligation to pursue and know your spiritual leaders, whether they be pastors, elders, deacons, or other mature Christian; people of biblical character that you can look up to? You have a command from God to recognize those leaders, and to go out of your way to see them encouraged by allowing them to encourage you in your faith. You may want to ask, “Where stands written?” (solicit the question). I am so glad you asked. Look at what Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13. Remember, we are noting from our Acts text the motivation for Paul and Barnabas to go back into hostile territory in order to encourage the saints. Such a motivation was born out of their love for the church and their understanding that the church needs leadership. To this church in Thessalonica Paul writes these words concerning the congregation’s role in the lives of their leaders;

12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

Do you see the commands? There are two. First, you are called to “**appreciate**” your spiritual leaders. The meaning of this word, at its very roots, speaking of “knowing intimately, personally, deeply.” You are to “**appreciate**” those who do three things in your spiritual life; 1) they diligently labor among you; 2) they have charge over you in the Lord, and 3) they give you instruction (and implicit in the text, instruction in the word of God). Certainly pastors, elders, and spiritual leaders have a responsibility to make themselves available to those in the congregation, but the charge here is that you make yourself available to them, because that is what the church needs, this is what displays a high view of the church. Paul and Barnabas went back to the cities, they made themselves available, but then it would be up to those believers in those cities then to come to them, and some of them came to Paul and Barnabas in such a way that they were able to be appointed as elders.

There is a second command in the 1 Thessalonians passage. It is that you “**esteem**” your spiritual leaders, not casually, not occasionally, not when they just seemingly go out of their way for you, but very highly in love because of their work. The idea here is to regard them with the dual intent of respect for the minister’s role and demonstrable affection for his work. This is the congregational charge. Because believers need leadership, and leadership is not always appreciated or respected, thus, in the church, leadership needs the love, support, the availability, and the faithfulness of the congregation. As Paul and Barnabas returned to these cities, they were met with appreciation and esteem. This enabled them to train and appoint elders for the churches. Believers need leadership.

There is a fourth thing that young believers need in particular and all believers need generally...

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4. Believers need prayer (14:23b)

We see this in the second half of verse 23 where we see that these elders were appointed with **“prayer with fasting”**. Let me just point out that as Paul and Barnabas made their appointments of the elders, it was not done just on their own whims; it was not a popularity contest. As Paul and Barnabas prayed and fasted over the decisions, they were teaching the new churches an important lesson. What is that lesson?

Listen, *we ought not to make any important decision without prayer*; and in the context here, prayer with other saints. We need prayer; to bring our petitions, our concerns and our need for direction before the God who has promised to hear. Before the Body of Christ does anything, she needs to communicate with her Head and find out what He desires; that they might know His direction. The believers need prayer. This brings us to the one final “something”...

5. Believers need reminding to hope in the Lord (23c).

...they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

This is the final “something” Paul and Barnabas did before heading home to Antioch, Syria. The **“commended”** the congregation to the Lord. The word **“commended”** literally means “to place alongside; to put into the care of.” This tells us that Paul and Barnabas were teaching the congregation not to have their hopes rest them, as spiritual leaders, but in the Lord. Just as in ancient Israel the kings were commanded not to accumulate for themselves horses and men so that they would fail to depend upon the Lord, we must commit one another to the care and providence of the Lord. We need to encourage the attitude of the Psalmist who wrote in Psalm 20:7, **“7 Some boast in chariots and some in horses, But we will boast in the name of the Lord, our God.”** If we lead people to Jesus and fail to push them to trust in the Lord, they will be in trouble when we are not around. If Christians become too dependent upon the words and teachings of a man for their faithfulness to God; they will fail with the trial comes. As you leave a service where the Word of God has been taught, you are then being commended, committed to the Lord, being reminded to trust Him to accomplish His work in you. But as you leave a service, you will be tempted to trust in just about anything but the Lord. You may begin to trust in yourself. “Yes, that was a good sermon and all, but I am basically okay, I don’t need to worry about putting all of that Bible stuff into practice, I went to church and God should be pleased enough with that!” Do you think so? You may trust in the strength or wealth of yourself or your parents, or the wisdom of your government (okay, maybe not that). Listen to the words of Jeremiah 9:23-24. There we read this,

23 Thus says the Lord, “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; 24 but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,” declares the Lord.”

Do you understand and know God better? Do you know what delights the Lord? According to our text, what pleased the Lord was this; believers who loved the church enough to serve the church regardless of the personal cost. Believers, whether they are young in the faith, or seasoned, need five things. They need the strengthening of their souls, the encouraging of

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their faith, leadership/structure to instruct and inspire, prayer and attention and, reminders to hope in the Lord. This is what Paul and Barnabas modeled for us. And if we would love the church; if we would have a high view of the church even as these men of God did, then we will seek to do these very things. For as they did these things, they could commend the believers to the Lord. Thus we read in verses 24-25, **“24 They passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia. 25 When they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.”**

Paul and Barnabas could now leave these churches because they were confident of two things. **First**, that these believers were grounded in Christ; and **second**, that they were connected to the local church. You may know of people who think that because they belong to the invisible, universal church, the world-wide conglomeration of believers, that they do not need the local church. I came across a story that illustrates the absurdity of this thinking. Once, a woman came to the church choir director telling him very matter of fact, “I want to sing in the choir.” The choir director replied, “That’s great, but if you want to sing in the choir, you will need to be a member of the church.” Taken aback, she replied, “I don’t want to be a member of this church. I’m already a member of the invisible church.” To which the choir director replied, “Ok then, you may go sing in the invisible choir.”

Let me ask you, where is Christ today? Our immediate response is to say, “In heaven,” which is true, but biblically and just as factually, where is Christ today? He is here, among us, right now by the presence of His indwelling Spirit. In Ephesians 1:22-23 we read, **“And He [God the Father] put all things in subjection under His [God the Son’s] feet, and gave Him [Jesus] as head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”**

Here is the truth of Scripture applied. Our living Head works through local churches. When you read the pages of the New Testament, you will find that the emphasis is not upon the church universal, but upon the local church. How do we know this? To whom were the letters of the New Testament written? Either to local churches or to individuals working in local churches.

The pattern of Paul, and thus the teaching of the New Testament is this; *that as people come to know Christ as Lord and Savior, they are then to be linked to other believers in local expressions of the body of Christ.* Can a Christian survive apart from a church? To be sure, there are some Christians who have no choice. They are trapped in a hospital bed, or living in a place in the world where no church exists. God is certainly sufficient to provide for such a one as this. Yes, you can still get to heaven if you **cannot** go to church. But the problem for many is not that they **cannot** go to church but rather that they **will not**. While it is technically possible to live the Christian life in isolation, it is certainly not the norm nor is it ideal. When you become a Christian, having trusted in the truth that Jesus died for your sins and transforms you to live like Him, you are thus called into a right and living relationship with God (1 Corinthians 1:9). But 1 John 1:3 makes it clear that we enter into a fellowship that goes two ways: first with God and then with other Christians.

The New Testament never separates Christians into the church members and the non-church members. All the way through, it assumes that every believer is participating in his/her local assembly. It gives no example, not even one, of a Christians who belong to the “universal church” but who has no link with a local church. To say this directly, any idea that you can enjoy the blessing of salvation or that you can be a Christian in isolation from the church is absolutely foreign to the New Testament writings. Whenever Christians are within range of each other in the

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New Testament, they meet. Every time the apostle Paul went into a town in the book of Acts where there were no Christians, he preaches Christ, sees people saved and then he organized them into a group – their only local church.

It would be illogical to say that you are part of the worldwide, universal church, and yet refuse to gather with that local expression of the universal church that exists in your geographical area. It would be like claiming you have a car when the right fender is in Rogers, the engine is in Fayetteville, and the wheels are in Eureka Springs! That is not a car, that is the beginning of the inventory for a junkyard. The car will not run until the pieces are put together. The church will not function correctly if all the parts are not present.

So Paul organized the new believers into local fellowships. Why? Because as we saw, it is in local churches that believers were strengthened, encouraged, received godly leadership and structure, learned deeper prayer, and were constantly reminded to hope in the Lord even if their spiritual mentor or mentors were not there.

I know that I am not getting very far in this text and time dictates that we stop here as we celebrate the Lord's Table. As we come to the Lord's Table, let me leave you with this thought: "Why did Christ offer Himself on the cross for our sins?" There are a number of good Biblical answers to that question. First and foremost, Christ did this to the glory of God the Father as Jesus so stated in John 17:1-3. But another key reason Christ gave Himself for us renegade, selfish, sinful people is that He might make us one people with Himself. And that one people united to Christ is called the Church. Jesus gave Himself for us so that we might become part of His body, part of His fellowship, part of God's family. To love Christ is to love the Church and to love the Church is to love Christ. Let us be wary of any activity or attitude that would diminish our love and affection for either Christ or the Church He died to save.

Soli Deo Gloria

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