

# 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: With a High View of the Church (Part 3)**

*Acts 14:21-28*

*21 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. 26 From there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished. 27 When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. 28 And they spent a long time with the disciples.*

We are coming to the close of the first missionary journey ever conducted by the early church. You may recall it started back in Acts 13. As the church was gathered for the purpose of being taught the Word of God, the Holy Spirit set apart Paul and Barnabas to embark on this journey where by sea and by foot they would travel some 1500 miles, visiting some ten key cities, preaching the gospel, the good news concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ. Let me remind you what the essence of the gospel is. And there is no better summary of the gospel Paul preached than from the mouth of Paul himself. Here is the gospel encapsulated:

***3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...***

***1 Corinthians 15:3-4***

This is what Paul taught, that Christ died for our sins; the recognition that we are sinners, we have missed the mark that God intends for every human to hit. Paul would say it this way in Romans 3:23, that all have sinned and fall short, miss the mark of the glory of God. We were created to bring glory to God, but sin diminishes not only that glory, but also the very purpose for why we were created. But notice that Christ died for our sins “according to the Scriptures.” What is sin? Sin is anything that God says it is. Sin is not relative and cultural. God has declared how people are to live, to think, to act and deviations or perversions from that revelation not only demean the one who created us in His own image, but they also diminish our humanity. Man was created to bring glory to God, to reflect His character, His purpose, His gloriousness, His wonder and because of sin; our nature is bent, twisted, and unable to reflect that glory properly. Such a diminished and defective humanity deserves death, as Paul would note in Romans 6:23 saying that the wages, the just deserved due for sin is death. But Christ died for our sins. Christ died in the place of guilty sinners. He was buried, according to 1 Corinthians 15:3, meaning that He really did die. He really was the sin bearer. However, Jesus did something that no other person has ever or will ever be able to do; He not only bore the punishment of sin, which is death, but then He defeated death by being raised on the third day, just as He said, reminding us that everything else He taught on, whether while He Himself was on the earth or through His chosen apostles who gave us the New Testament is trustworthy and reliable. It is all according to the

# Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

Scripture. Thus for Paul and Barnabas; for the early Church, indeed for every generation, the gospel preached is that Jesus came into the world to save sinners; to save them from their sin, to change them into the people God intended from the beginning, those who would reflect the glory, the character, the nature, the very moral attributes of the God who created us.

In his book, *Mere Christianity*, a book I recommend each of you read, C.S. Lewis once wrote, “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.” Until we come to the end of ourselves and realize that there is no experience in this world that truly satisfies the soul, that the corruption of this world taints anything that might be seemingly good and that my own corruption taints even the good I might do, then I will look up and beg the God of Heaven to save me and to show me that which I was intended for, that my life, in body, soul and spirit would bring glory to God. That beloved is the gospel, Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that He was buried and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scripture.

What happens when we believe that? Well, God has already been doing a work in us as we come to believe such things, changing our hearts and minds to love the things He loves and to put off the things He rejects. The result or the effects of the gospel in one’s life is a putting off, like old dirty garments, the ways and thinkings of world and putting on, like new clean garments, the ways and thinkings of God. It is a long passage, but turn with me to Colossians 3. Here we see Paul speaking of the results of having been raised up with Christ. It results in a putting off the old and a putting on the new.

## **Colossians 3:1-10**

***[your transformation] 1 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. [your focus] 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. [your purpose] 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. [your action] 5 Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. 6 For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, 7 and in them you also once walked [but no longer], when you were living in them. 8 But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, [positively] 10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him — ... 12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.***

This is the essence of the gospel that Paul and Barnabas preached on their first missionary journey. And, as we noted, as people believe such truths, they were then encouraged, exhorted and gathered into local assemblies, called churches; gatherings of Christians who came together, as we noted last week I Acts 14:22-25, to find their souls

# Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

strengthened, their faith encouraged, leaders appointed, lives prayed for and to be reminded of their responsibility to God. I had pointed out that this was a reflection of Paul and Barnabas’s high view of the church, as they literally risked their lives to accomplish these things for these young believers. We learned that our living Head works through 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.

Now, finishing up this text and the first missionary journey, we find that Paul and Barnabas not only believed that these young believers need to be connected to the local church, but as they journeyed home, we see a second emphasis, namely that seasoned believers also need the local church.

## II. Seasoned Christians need the local church (14:26-28).

*26 From there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished. 27 When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. 28 And they spent a long time with the disciples.*

It might have been easy for Paul and Barnabas to have remained with one of these new churches. The people loved them and there certainly was a need that these new believers had to be taught. However, Paul and Barnabas had such a high view of the church that they knew that even the seasoned believers back in their home church in Antioch, Syria needed strengthening and encouragement by hearing what God had been doing. These final three verses reveal three things the point to their high view of the local church.

### A. They submitted to the authority of the church (14:26).

It is not a very popular or much practiced concept in our church culture of today, but in the early church members willingly and purposely submitted themselves to the authority of the church as the church served God. We see Paul and Barnabas doing this in verse 26, *From **there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished.*** This task took nearly two years to complete. But notice that there are two key actions here that reflect the authority of the church and the submission of Paul and Barnabas to that authority.

First, the sending church, that is Antioch, “commended” [committed them to the purpose] them to the grace of God. Back at the beginning of Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas were in a great situation, teachers in a robust and growing church. Then the Spirit directed them to leave to preach the gospel to others. They obeyed as well as the entire church. The church gave them a job to do and the church was just as committed in sending Paul and Barnabas as they were in going on this journey.

Second, Paul and Barnabas “accomplished” the work by the grace of God. If ministry or service to God is going to accomplish God’s purpose, it must be a work of grace. If it is to be pleasing to God, it cannot be done on our own, in our own strength and by our own talents. That makes it a human thing. But when we see God’s grace involved, we see things accomplished that we could never do on our own. This is something that both the church in Antioch as well as Paul and Barnabas understood. The text records that before these men left, it was the church

# Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

that committed them to the grace of God. This points to the authority of the local church. Yes, Paul and Barnabas were apostles, set apart and sent out ones by God. But these men were not mavericks so full of themselves that they robbed God of glory. These men were not only sent out by God, but they were sent out by the authority of the local church. But there is more...

## **B. They were accountable to the church (14:27).**

*When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.*

At one time or another many of you may have attended some kind of “missionary conference.” We here at Hope rarely find all our missionaries home at the same time, but when they are in town, we set aside a time for them to report to us what God has been accomplishing through their ministry. As they do this, they are making themselves accountable to us. We support them through our prayers, through our giving, through our notes and gifts of encouragement and they willingly, lovingly and enthusiastically want to “justify” our involvement.

This is what we find Paul and Barnabas doing as they return to Antioch. Notice our text says that they “**gathered the church together.**” They were eager to communicate the doings of God. By the way, this phrase, “**gathered the church together,**” reminds us that the church is *people*, not a building. *The church is wherever believers are gathered together for the purpose of learning about and worshipping God according to the Scriptures.* To have the church and to be the church, we must gather the people.

The church at Antioch played a vital role in the lives that were changed from Cyprus to Derbe. They had prayed and had been willing to give up two of its best teachers. Now the church was going to enjoy the fruit of the labor. Paul and Barnabas called the church together because they knew they were accountable to and owed the church a “report” – a telling of all that God had accomplished through them. Beloved, may I ask you, are you accountable to your local church? Do you realize that as you receive instruction in the Lord here and are commended to the grace of the Lord to do his work week by week that there is an expectation that you will report back the things God has done?

As it says there in verse 27, Paul and Barnabas reported “*all things that God had done with them...*” Everything was a commentary about what God had done. All the glory, all the accomplishments and accolades went to God. There was no grandiose press conference exalting a successful campaign. There were no self-serving interviews on Christian radio stations drawing attention to their efforts, their hardships and their personal successes. What did they report? They reported in no uncertain terms all that *God had done through them.* Oh that we would want to talk more about what God has done and less about ourselves; particularly as we come to church. Proverbs 29:23 reminds us, “**A man’s pride will bring him low, But a humble spirit will obtain honor.**” The humble in spirit are those who look up to God. Let me remind you of something as we gather as the church. We are here to bring glory to God, it is not about us, but about Jesus. When something good happens in ministry, it is because God has worked in us and all the glory belongs to Him.

So Paul and Barnabas submitted to the authority of the church, made themselves accountable to the church and finally...

# Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

## C. They were available to the church (14:28).

*And they spent a long time with the disciples.*

There was a phrase that was used in medieval times, in Latin it was *durante bene placito regis*, which translates as “during the pleasure of the king.” This did not mean, “while the king was having fun”; it meant that nobody could hold an official position against the will of the king. The point was that a person’s service was available whenever and however the king desired. While the church is no kingly authority, it ought to be our intent to serve at the pleasure of the church, whose King is Jesus. We need to make ourselves available to the church.

Paul and Barnabas understood that they were not rock stars, but were righteous servants, needed to serve the church. In verse 28 we see this service as, **“they spent a long time with the disciples.”** We do not know how long this was. Most think it was at least a year. And while Paul and Barnabas undoubtedly needed to get some rest and recover from their long journey, they also continued to serve, using their gifts of teaching to instruct and build up the church. I think there are at least two things that we need to understand as we read this. Let me make this very personal for you.

**First**, we must know this truth, **“I need the church.”** It may seem rather obvious, but how easily this can be overlooked. I will make it personal for me. What is my calling and role as a believer. I am a preacher and teacher of God’s Word. I have been called to shepherd the flock of God. God has gifted me for this task. But how can I fulfill my God ordained role unless the members of the church gather for the purpose of being instructed in the Word. Thus, I need the church. I cannot be a healthy, growing Christian and neglect my local church any more than I could cut off my foot and expect to walk well.

There is a story about several blind men who try describing an elephant after touching various parts of it. Because the elephant is quite large, each man can only touch a limited portion. The man touching the leg says the elephant is like a tree. The one touching the tail says it is like a snake. This goes on as each man comes to a different and incomplete conclusion about the elephant.

This story reminds me of the problem with people who believe they do not need the church. Last year, “World” magazine reported a statement made by a celebrity and self-professed Christian, Justin Bieber that underscores this problem. He said, “I don’t consider myself religious. I haven’t been to church in a long time, but I know I have a relationship with Him.”

I am sorry, but biblically that is not possible. Bieber is elevating his supposed private experience of God over a biblically mandated shared experience that is to be manifest in the church among fellow believers. Such an attitude began with the Jesus People movement of the 1960’s and 70’s. A song that came out of that movement reveals this attitude a self-focused religion. The lyrics said:

Me and Jesus, we got our own thing going  
Me and Jesus, we got it all worked out  
Me and Jesus, we got our own thing going  
We don’t need anybody to tell us what it’s all about

# Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

Interesting use of “we” at the end, but I will not swallow that which is not biblical. People like Beiber and others who alienate themselves from the church are not only missing out, they are demeaning Jesus Himself. Where stands it written that Jesus comes by Himself? When you come to Jesus, you get Him to be sure, but you also get the whole family of God. Jesus comes with the apostles, the pastors and teachers, the martyrs, the saints, and yes, even you and me. We do not get Jesus all to ourselves, nor should we want that. We get Jesus as part of a community of people who have been redeemed by Him.

Why do we get Jesus this way? Remember the elephant and the blind men? Our God is multifaceted. The theological term is that God is infinite. Not only can we not fully comprehend Him in His fullness, but we can even struggle to appreciate the little bit He has revealed to us. Right? We are like blind men each touching just a portion of that huge elephant. What the blind men needed to better comprehend the beast was not a smaller elephant that they could individually manage, but rather more men to describe what they were touching.

Beloved, this is why you need the church. We need all the other lessons and experiences of God to help us better know and appreciate Him. Our own experience of Jesus is wonderful, and by way of salvation, it is more than enough, but it is not enough in the sense of seeing the grandeur of Jesus. We need each other for this.

And our Lord Jesus modeled this very thing. Jesus did not work with just one disciple, nor with even just three, or six, or even with just twelve. To be sure, some were more intimate with Jesus than others, but when they gathered together and shared what they had learned, they grew in their appreciation for Jesus. This is by God’s design. Did you ever wonder why we have four gospel accounts rather than just one? We have the benefit of four perspectives on the life and ministry of Jesus.

Beloved, we do not get to live out our Christianity in isolation. We are intended for body life, community. I need what one person finds out about Jesus and shares with me. Then, by this cumulative insight of the church gathered, we gain a more complete picture of Christ. Why have a high view of the church? Because we cannot, as individuals, see and understand enough of Him on our own. Christians who isolate themselves from the body are condemning themselves to a perverted, distorted and limited view of God. We need to know and say, **“I need the church!”** Paul and Barnabas needed the church and spent a long time there. But there is a second truth....

**Second**, we need to be able to say, **“The church needs me.”** This is a hard one for some people to fathom. We think we have little or nothing to contribute to the body of Christ. Yet to this way is demeaning God and what His Word says is true about every believer. Every member of the body of Christ has been granted a spiritual-gift, a God-given ability to help build up the church! When we fail to use our gifts, either out of neglect or even out of ignorance, the church suffers for it!

I know that there are Sunday mornings when we feel like we have nothing to offer the church? So we wonder why we should go. We need to go because we need the church and the church needs us. Missing church is not like missing a day at work, or a ball practice, or someone’s birthday party. The God of Creation saved you and placed you into the Body of Christ and by His good providence, into a local expression of that body, the church. Augustine, the fourth century church father wrote, “No man can have God for his father unless he has the Church for his mother.” Perhaps it seems a bit overstated to us that somehow we need the

---

## Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

church as much as we need God. However, *God has revealed to us that we need the church.* John Wesley once said, “No man ever went to heaven alone; he must either find friends or make them.” And the insightful Bible commentator, William Barclay said, “Christianity must be lived in a fellowship.” Who needs the local church? Both young and seasoned believers. Let me close by pointing out two very important and practical truths.

**First**, what is your relationship with the Head of the church? In Colossians 1:18 we read, **“He [Jesus] is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.”** Notice that Jesus is not just the head of a person individually, but also the head of the Church, the gathered believers. Are you linked to the Head? Is Jesus your Lord and Savior. How intimate are you with the Head of the church? You cannot be intimate with Christ without being intimate with the church.

**Second**, what is your relationship with the Body? It is impossible to be right with the Head and not right with His Body. What is the nature of your relationship with the Body? Are you engaged and involved with the church? Do you realize that a person level of commitment and involvement in the body of Christ is a measure of their commitment to Christ Himself. That is staggering. Thus we ought to be asking for places to serve, seeking for places to serve and encouraging other to serve the Body of Christ.

It all begins by being in right relationship with the one whom Paul preached, the Lord Jesus Christ. Have you come to know Him as Lord and Savior? If not, please plead with Him, asking Him to make Himself known to you. If you have, then plead with Him to make you appreciate His work for you by serving His people all the more, to the glory of God, to the building up of the body of Christ and to the reaching of Northwest Arkansas and the world with the gospel of Christ.

---

*Soli Deo Gloria*

---

**Copyright © 2013 Edward K. Godfrey.** *This message is the sole property of the copyright holder and may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this message must contain the above copyright notice. This message may not be copied in part (except for small quotations used with citation of source), edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of the copyright holder. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Edward K. Godfrey, Pastor, Hope Community Bible Church, and 2300 South 13<sup>th</sup> Street, Rogers, AR 72758.*