

Following Paul's Example When Things Get Tough Acts 14:1-20

Outline:

Intro

Faithfulness on display

- 1) Faithfulness More Faithfulness (vs 1, 20)
- 2) Patience (vs.2-5)
- 3) Wisdom (vs. 6-7)
- 4) Supernatural Work (vs 8-10)
- 5) Teaching (vs 11-17)
- 6) Dealing with Disappointments (vs 18)
- 7) Endurance (vs 19)

Faithfulness explained

-How and why Paul lived with perseverance

Intro:

Gospel Ministry is hard! How's that for the opening line of a sermon. I'm sure some places will teach you to not open a sermon in a way that will discourage people, but sometimes the reality needs to be stated. Even though we live in America, we have experienced great blessing, freedom, and can give the perception that gospel ministry is not hard, in reality it's always been and always will be difficult and in some ways impossible. Oh there may be times of blessing, and you may be experiencing the fruit of the ministry, and what a joy that is when you are in the midst of that type of season! However, that should not be mistaken as ministry getting easier, rather, it is simply a grace of God. It is not of your own doing, but rather that in the Lord's providence, He is working in a way that we can see fruit for his honor and glory.

I feel like that is one reason why so many people fail to engage in gospel ministry. They are perfectly content sitting in the services on Sunday morning hearing an inspirational message or maybe even being challenged by the truth in order to grow in their knowledge of God's word, but when you ask them to serve in a ministry you start to get a different tune. They simply will not engage in gospel ministry. There may be several reasons for this. One, they may not know how to engage in gospel ministry. That is where the church needs to rally together in order to help teach and train them to be a discipler. Two, it could be they have allowed their lives to

become so crowded and distracted, they are not physically able to engage in gospel ministry. They could see someone in the grocery store, sit up by someone in the lunchroom, or talk to someone across the back yard briefly and never see the opportunity to engage that person with the gospel. Their lives are just simply too busy. They don't have the focus, mental capacity, or emotional energy to even see the need for gospel ministry. Third, they have been hurt before. Ministry can get messy, and when you open yourself up to be vulnerable with people, you will get hurt. You will experience the stains from the messiness. There may be other reasons, legit reasons, why someone is not actively engaging in gospel ministry right now, and we won't take time to address all of those today.

How did Paul do it? He was criticized, betrayed, mocked, beaten, imprisoned, left for dead, and he still keeps on going. The text we have before us today is a great example of Paul's perseverance. Like I said before gospel ministry is hard, and we Americans who lack a little bit of perseverance. We live in a society of ease in which we can have anything we want instantly. We could have meals in a matter of minutes through a microwave or through a drive-through. We could have money in our hands to purchase things through a credit card. Simply by holding the personal computer in our pockets a world of information is at our fingertips. We can become easily distracted, if we do not get the instant gratification, or the results that we are looking for in a short period of time, we have a tendency to just give up. However, today's text begs us to look at Paul and learn by his example of what it means to live with perseverance. Paul was a faithful minister of the gospel. Even though he experienced some great hardships in life, and amazingly we see that he and the rest of the team continue on with the gospel ministry. What kept him going? What kept him faithful?

Here is the road map of where we are heading today. First, we are going to see Perseverance on display. Throughout the text we are going to look at seven characteristics Paul displays that allowed him to have perseverance. Here are the seven characteristics that we will see: faithfulness, patience, wisdom, dependent on the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, teaching, dealing with disappointment, and endurance. Secondly, we are going to look at Perseverance explained. We will look at the source, reason, and how Paul was able to remain so faithful in the midst of so much suffering and persecution.

So with that being said, let's jump into our text and we'll talk about the seven as we come to them in our reading.

Perseverance on Display (Acts 14:1-20)

1) Faithfulness... More Faithfulness (vs 1, 20)

20. "Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed."

Faithfulness bookends this text that we are looking at today. Now before we rush past this too quickly, let's take a minute to remember why they're in Iconium in the first place. If you recall from last week they were in Antioch preaching the gospel, and Paul experienced some extreme criticism of him personally from the Jewish leaders. Ultimately, the result is being run out of town by the Jewish leaders and their friends. Paul and the rest of the ministry team traveled about 80 miles southeast of Antioch to the city of Iconium. The city of Iconium is still in the Galatia region and is a very diverse and wealthy city. It has a Roman military base nearby and it's right along one of the main Roman highways.

I don't know about you, but after my experience in Antioch I would've been tempted to switch up my strategy. Paul does no such thing. Just like he did in Antioch, following the convictions of his heart, he went to the synagogue first. He knew that these people loved the Lord, and he wanted to let them know that the Messiah had come. He wanted to reach his fellow Jewish brothers and sisters. This is faithfulness! In my weakness, and in my propensity to be a people pleaser, I would've changed my pattern of ministry. I wonder if this is how we see some of the dangerous things in ministry that we see today. If we hide behind a program, it's not me they are attacking, it's not our message, but rather it's the program. Maybe, they think to themselves, what if we try to make the message a little easier to swallow. Then they won't get hostile and we will have more time to teach them the full meaning of the truth. These are all temptations and more, but we see here Paul continues to follow the same pattern going to where there are people who are concerned about the things of the Lord and continuing to preach the gospel boldly. How do I know he did that? Look at the result! Both Jews and Gentiles came to know the Lord as their personal Savior! The Lord was using Paul! If you notice in verse one it uses that same word "spoke". Confidently, clearly, boldly speaking the truth of God's word.

20 But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe."

Then you get to the end of our text can you see after a whole bunch of things happen that we will get to throughout this message and believe me, they were not light things we see that he enters back into the city and the next day heads on to Derby another city where he can continue to preach the word. Then, and I don't want to steal from Pastor's text next week, but if you read on the next couple of verses he suggests going back through all of those cities that he just experienced persecution in order to strengthen the disciples and the churches that were established. Amazing! What faithfulness distributed by Paul! Oh how easy I give up. Oh how easy I make excuses. Oh how easy I try to change the pattern that the Lord has given to us. I pray that I am able to have that much faithfulness. How did he get that faithfulness? Where did it come from? We will save that for the end of this message. But I want to take a few minutes to think through the question: what is faithfulness? What does it look like? Is it just blind loyalty? Yes involves consistency, but does this mean that we can never change? I think we will start to get a picture of faithfulness as we walk through these next six characteristics shown by Paul.

2) Patience (vs. 2-4)

"2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. 3 So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. 4 But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles."

As we can see here, the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, why are they always going after the Gentiles?, and try to disrupt the spread of the gospel in the city. So this resulted in Paul and the ministry team staying in the city of Iconium "for a long time". What were they doing? They were "speaking boldly for the Lord." In one sense they're doing better here in Iconium than I did in Antioch, because they weren't run out of town right away. However, the result was not completely perfect. Even though the Lord allowed them to do various signs, wonders, and miracles (more on that later) the city still became divided. We know something about a divided people right now, don't we? However, Paul remained faithful and patient in his work to spread the word of the gospel as long as he was providential he was allowed to stay. There's no sense here of him getting frustrated or wanting them to hurry up and grasp it, so that he can move on to the next city. Rather, he was willing to stay as long as possible, as long as they would allow him to continue to preach the gospel. He had a big missionary journey ahead of him, but he didn't allow the things on his to-do list to interfere with the Spirits

working and the people at Iconium. Ultimately, he trusted the Lord's Providential timing. Do you tend to get impatient in ministry? Things just don't seem to happen as fast as you think they should? What do you do? Move to the next great idea or do you display patience?

Paul's patience did not become stubbornness. It did not become stale. It wasn't just routine or tradition. As we can see in the next part of our story he has great wisdom and when it was time to leave, they left.

3) Wisdom (vs. 5-7)

"5 When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, 6 they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, 7 and there they continued to preach the gospel."

Some of the Jewish leaders are getting fed up with Paul preaching the truth of God's Word, so they devised a plan to stone him. This is a punishment in the Jewish culture reserve for those who are speaking Blasphemy. They wanted to kill Paul and maybe the others in the missionary team. If they were just being stubborn or if they were just in a routine, then they would have stayed. However, Paul, because he was walking in step with the spirit, exercised wisdom and left the dangerous situation. It's a question I don't know that we ask a lot. When is it OK to leave? When is it OK to walk away from a ministry? When is it OK to walk away for some potential persecution? Reality is there is no special formula. It takes wisdom! Wisdom is a result of fearing the Lord! Wisdom is when we take the truth of God's Word and we are able to apply it to our lives. The skillful navigation of life when walking in step with the spirit. That is wisdom! When we demonstrate wisdom in the midst of the ministry that we are involved in we are able to see clearly, evaluate accurately, and act in a God honoring way.

So, did this stop his ministry team from continuing their missionary journey? I mean they had been criticized before, but being stoned takes it up to a whole new level, right? Of course you know the answer to that, they continued in perseverance and faithfully went on to the next city. Now let's take a look at their time in Lystra.

4) Dependant on Supernatural Work (vs 8-13)

8 Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. 9 He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul,

looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, 10 said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking.

Here we see Paul, Barnabas, and the rest of the team travel to Lystra. Lystra is a small city about 20 miles away. We're still in the Roman region of Galatia, however this is not an easy place to get to. They had to get off the highway and travel the backroads in order to get to the city. I get the impression that it's the type of place you do go to by accident. The city is a unique city with a unique set of beliefs that will get you here in a minute, but we see Paul and the rest of the team continue to minister the gospel. While they were there ministering the gospel he noticed a crippled man who had never walked before in his life. Ultimately, Through his apostolic power Paul healed a man in a way that "he sprung up and walked". The NIV said that, "the man jumped up and began to walk." This is incredible! Now it may be my training as an athletic trainer, but I cannot just rush past this. I have witnessed athletes and other patients experience injuries that require them to become non weight bearing for a short period of time. Then in the rehab process, I see the struggle it takes to learn to walk again. It takes weeks sometimes months for them to be comfortable enough to walk without crutches or some other device, and these are people that used to walk just a few months earlier. This man has never walked before in his life, and he just started walking as if he had his entire life. He didn't have to go through the baby stages of learning how to walk, adjusting his coordination to his length as he grew up, and becoming strong enough to jump. He just simply hopped up and walked. What an amazing God we serve! That when He does a miracle he does it right for His glory!! The reality is that this isn't even the most miraculous thing that happened in those few verses, and if you're like me, the first time we read it, we miss it.

If you look back at verse nine, it starts off by telling us that the man listened to Paul speaking. This man lived a life of begging on the streets. He could probably write volumes of books of the things that he had heard while sitting there looking for his next meal. However, he didn't just hear Paul. He didn't just notice that someone was doing something. The text says that he listened. What's the difference between listening and hearing? Every parent or teacher knows this: hearing means that you might hear the sound as the sound waves are hitting your eardrums, but you're not comprehending the words that are being spoken to you. On the other hand listening means that you are actively engaged with the content of the message, understanding, and remembering what is being said. This man was not just there for entertainment or to hear another whatever while sitting on the side of the street. For some reason this man was actively engaged in listening to

the truth of God's Word while Paul was teaching. It's interesting to me that in a lot of these patterns that we see are those who listen intently to God's Word, those who pay attention to God's word, and those who are taking the time to truly engage with God's word are the people that the Lord works in and through. This should be no surprise, because it is through the Word of God that our hearts are shaped, changed, and molded. What is your interaction with the word of God on a daily basis? Are you listening? Are you engaged with the text? Are you seeking to understand? Or are you just hearing it as part of the white noise that surrounds our lives?

Why did this man choose to listen to the teaching of Paul? The rest of the verse tells us, "And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well". The reason why this man did things differently that day was because the Lord, by His Grace, had given him the faith to be made well. Somehow through his apostolic power the Holy Spirit allowed Paul to see the faith this man possessed. The ESV Study Bible makes this observation, "The Holy Spirit gave Paul the ability somehow to see what was happening in the invisible, spiritual realm" Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast." This is the miracle that is greater than telling a man to stand up and walk. The fact that the Lord has given the gift of eternal life to a sinner. This man did not desire or have the ability to gain that eternal life, and the Lord not only granted him eternal life! God gave him what he needed in order to receive the gift of eternal life. The Lord regenerated his heart to be living, opened his eyes to see the truth but he was a sinner and then our God is a savior, and gave him the faith to believe. This is not just true that man. This is true of each and everyone of us who have been justified in being adopted into the family of God. He has to do a great work within a person. Otherwise, the reality is, without that work, gospel ministry is impossible. We can be the most eloquent speaker the world has ever known, develop the most well run organizations and programs the world has ever seen, and work harder than anyone else on the face of this planet, however without the Lord doing the supernatural work in people's lives gospel ministry is not going to be successful. This is why prayer is such an important part of gospel ministry. We are utterly dependent on the Holy Spirit working in the lives of those who The Lord has brought to us. We need to be on our knees regularly as a church and individually praying that the spirit will work on the hearts and lives of the people of Church, community, and world. Trying to do gospel ministry without prayer without dependence upon the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit in people's lives is like doing a lot of work on a treadmill. You run hard, you run fast, you wear yourself

out but you get nowhere. How is your prayer life? How would you describe your prayer life? Regular, consistent, sporadic, routine, boring, life filled? Prayer something the Lord has been convicting me about lately. We don't have time to get into it today, but I would love to learn more about prayer with you. I'm looking forward to when we could start Sunday School again in September, and my class will be launching into a series about prayer. The title will be something along the lines of Praying Biblically or Praying God's Way, and I'm excited to share with you the things that I've been learning and to learn from you as we work together to improve our discipline of prayer. I'm thankful to be a part of a church that takes prayer seriously. I'm thankful that we have members in this church who take prayer in their personal life seriously, and we can model our prayer life after them. Because the reality is gospel ministry is completely dependent upon God, it is essential that we are calling out to in our prayers.

Paul knew this. I love reading the prayers of Paul through the epistles, and it is clear through those prayers that he was dependent on the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit. The question we see here is after doing that type of miracle that many more come to believe? Let's find out in the next section of the story.

11 And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" 12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 13 And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.

People saw the same exact miracle. One man was made well, and the other went the opposite direction. Remember back to verse 3 that the signs and wonders are to bear witness to the words and the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, without the spirit working in the hearts and lives of people, they can see the same exact miracle and come to very different conclusions. In this case, they took their own beliefs, their own framework of life and molded it into the words Paul and Barnabas spoke. They saw the miracle and thought Paul and Barnabas were gods. They called Barnabas Zeus and they called Paul Hermes. Now why did they do this? Apparently, Lystra believed that their city received a visit from one of these Greek gods, and they had a temple built there for the worship of the gods. Once they saw Paul perform this miracle they thought the guards had come back to them. NIV Study Bible helps us see why they assigned these gods, "Zeus was the patron god of the city, and his temple was there...The identification of Zeus with

Barnabas may indicated that his appearance was more imposing, and Paul was identified as the god Hermes (the roman mercury) because he was the spokesman."

There is more that we can get into in the section, but for the sake of time let's just ask a few questions. Have you ever been working with someone in a discipleship type of relationship and the things that you were teaching them, showing them from scriptures, or completely misunderstood? How did you respond? Did you scold them for getting it wrong? Did you question your ability? Did you get frustrated? Let's take a look at how Paul responded.

5) Teaching (vs 11-17)

14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, 15 "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. 16 In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. 17 Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."

The first thing that we see here is that Paul and Barnabas tear their clothes. This is a Jewish sign of great grieving and mourning. Noticed they didn't get frustrated with them. They didn't blame anyone for the misunderstanding. They simply mourned the fact that their actions, though well intended, were taken wrong and lead people astray. Then they got to work teaching and explaining. Now that they had an understanding of where they were starting, the beliefs that they had held, they changed their teaching strategy, and started back at the beginning. We see Paul doing this time and time again as you look through the different ways that Paul taught. We can see he starts where they are and brings them to Christ. With the Jews he will start in the Old Testament, with the pagans he will start with their gods, and anywhere in between. Are you able to do that? Are you able to discern what someone's belief system is and then help walk them to the cross? It involves a couple of things, one it involves a conversation of understanding with someone else and their beliefs. It takes developing a relationship. Listening before talking, and then once you hear them and they know that you have their best interest in mind you can share the truth of God's Word that they need a Savior because of their sins. That belief system that they have built their entire life around is false and will lead them to on a path of destruction. These are hard words to hear, so we need to be able to speak the truth, yes, but in love and in grace. They need to know

that those words come from a place of love. If you are unsure that you were able to do that: one, keep studying the Scriptures. Two, that is what this church loves to do! We love to train and teach people how to be ministers and teachers of God's Word. Our mission is "to know Christ and to make him know". We believe that every member is a minister of the gospel, and we love to train people to do that. If you want more training in that type of ministry, come talk to one of us. We would love to point you to some resources and help you to know the Scriptures in a way that you can teach them to others.

Did Paul And Barnabas' teaching help, and the people realize the error of their ways? Verse 18 tells us.

6) Dealing with Disappointments (vs 18)

18 Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

Despite Paul and Barnabas, some of the greatest teachers of God's Word, explaining to them their need for a savior and how they are interpreting the things that they are teaching wrongly, these people continued to practice their pagan religions. The reality is Paul and Barnabas do not possess the power to change these peoples hearts as we talked about. Paul and Barnabas knew this and that's why their faithfulness was not grounded in the success of the ministry. Rather it was grounded and the fact they were making much of their Savior and faithfully serving him while ministering to others. In spite of realizing what they were doing it doesn't change the fact they pour their heart and soul into the teaching, they love these people, and probably experience great disappointment when they did not turn from their wicked ways. Have you ever experienced disappointment in ministry? Ever poured your life in a ministering to someone to see them walk away from the faith? Have you ever experienced the disappointment of being vulnerable and then seeing that being taken advantage of? This is a reality of ministry. This is what makes ministry hard at times, but we have to remember the why. We are not doing this in order to boost ourselves up, or to prove ourselves worthy, or any other earthly reason. We are doing this for the honor and glory of our Savior, and what He chooses to do and His providence through our ministry of the gospel we have to trust that that will bring Him the most honor and glory.

So we've seen gospel ministry that we need to have faithfulness, patience, wisdom, dependence on the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit, the ability to teach,

and the ability to deal with disappointment. The last characteristic we see is vital for gospel ministry from this text is endurance.

7) Endurance (vs 19)

19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. 20 But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.

While they were ministering here in Lystra, the people were upset with them and Antioch and Iconium I traveled over 100 miles to see them. Not only did they travel that far, but they did some work to find out where the team was located. Remember Lystra was off the beaten path so they had to work to find them. They were not satisfied with just Paul leaving their city, they wanted him out of the region, they wanted him dead. So, when they found him, they didn't even waste time dragging him out of the city before stoning him, as normal tradition would have it. They stoned him right in the middle of the city. then they drug him out, and left him for dead. I don't know if they just got sloppy, thought he was dead already, or just thought that he would give up after experiencing excruciating pain of being stoned, but he was not dead. They stopped short of killing him. Regardless of why they left him there for dead, it did not have the result they wanted. If they thought that Paul would stop preaching the gospel, they were completely wrong. They were persistent, but he had an endurance at times only from the Holy Spirit working inside of him and a life that is focused on Jesus Christ. After the stoning, the rest of the team stood around him not knowing what to think, and I am amazed by Paul's faithfulness in this moment. The text says he stood up, went back into the city, and then left for Derby the next day. Wow! What amazing faithfulness but the experience of near death didn't even slow him down on his mission to make Christ known!

Now that's what happened. The beautiful thing about the book of Acts as we get to see the story of what happened. We get to see the example but the early church left us to follow. However, we don't always see the why in the how behind the actions. I hope you have been listening to this and hearing the actions of Paul. The stuff that it takes in order to be a faithful minister of the gospel: Faithfulness, patience, wisdom, dependence on the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit, ability to teach, dealing with disappointment, in an endurance that we do not see anywhere else, and think to yourself Pastor Matt that is not possible. Even if I

wanted to live with that kind of faithfulness, I do not have it within me. Great! That's exactly where we need to be because the reality is none of us have the ability to live in this way in and of ourselves. I want to take a few minutes now to go to the epistles and show you a handful of texts that reveal to us the why behind Paul. How he was able to live a life that we read here, and help you to know what the Lord is calling us to do as a result of reading a story like this. If we walk away from a story like this thinking that we just need to try harder we have missed it!

Faithfulness Explained: Why/How do you keep going?

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 - 14 For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; 15 and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

Does the Love of Christ control you? You don't have to earn that love. You can do nothing to earn more love from Christ! We simply have the amazing privilege of living and obeying as a result of that love.

Galatians 2:20 - I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Philippians 1:21 - For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Paul was very clear about how he viewed life. His personal goals, ideas, ambitions were crucified, dead. His sole purpose in life was to make much of Christ and fulfill the mission. This was so true in his life he was willing to be poured out like a drink offering!

Philippians 2:17 - Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.

From these verses here, we can see that the strength to live a life of faithfulness, of perseverance, is utter dependence on the person and work of Jesus Christ. That was Paul's singular focus. I did not matter the circumstances around him, the persecution that he went through, or what life threw at him, he was singularly focused on gospel Ministry and making much of our Savior. We need to fall on our knees daily and desperately plead with our savior to give us the faith to live a life in dependence on him. You see that's the difference between faithfulness and all of the other lesser substitutes that we have here on earth. Faithfulness has at its

root faith. True faithfulness comes by trusting with all of your life on the person and work of Jesus Christ. That's not just true for salvation but it's true and how we live our lives. Even in the midst of persecution, in the midst of a country in chaos, In the midst of a worldwide pandemic, and any other difficult thing that our life brings us, it is through faith in Christ that we are able to live a life pleasing to him and on mission. I pray that we would all be able to live a life that way and that we may be able to echo the same words at the end of our life that Paul says in 2 Timothy 4:6-8, For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.