

God Bears Witness

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 August 2021

Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Please return to your seats when you get a chance, and we will continue our worship this evening. We will continue our worship this evening with the reading and preaching of God's Word.

Welcome to all of you. My name is Sean. I'm one of the pastors of Trinity Cambridge Church, and it is my joy and privilege to preach God's Word to you this evening. We have been going through the Book of Acts.

We took a two-week break from the series, and we are now returning to the Book of Acts. We're in Chapter 14 today, so please turn with me to Acts Chapter 14.

[1 : 41] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Let's pray for the reading and preaching of God's Word. Heavenly Father, we incline the ears of our hearts to your Word, because we believe that in it you speak to us, dress us as your people, because we know that it is able to make us wise unto salvation in Jesus Christ.

And we pray that as we listen to your Word this evening, that you would so build up our faith in your Word, it would make each of us bold evangelists, bold gospelizers, people who share the good news of Jesus Christ with those around them with confidence that you yourself will move in power.

And bear witness to your Word. And we ask that you would exalt the name of your Son, Jesus, our Savior.

Magnify the grace and glory that you reveal to us in Jesus, that we might stand in awe of Him, worship Him, and love Him more than we ever have.

[3 : 50] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Acts chapter 14, verses 1 to 28. 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.

But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. 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.

But the people of the city were divided. Some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews with their rulers to mistreat them and to stone them, they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country.

And there they continued to preach the gospel. Now, at Lystra, there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked.

He listened to Paul speaking, and Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, Stand upright on your feet.

[5 : 18] And he sprang up and began walking. And when the crowd 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.

Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 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.

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, 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.

In past generations, he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. 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.

[6 : 28] Even with these words, they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them. 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.

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. When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia.

And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Atalia. And from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

And they remained no little time with the disciples. This is God's holy and authoritative word. God has a funny way of telling us to do things that we are not able to do.

[7 : 59] He tells us to join him in Christ's mission of seeking and saving the lost, but we are unable to do so. For he says in Ephesians chapter 2 verse 8, by grace you have been saved through faith.

And this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God. God tells us to consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.

But then in 1 Thessalonians 3 verse 12 says that it is the Lord who makes us increase and abound in love. God tells us to work for one another's progress in the faith.

faith. And yet we are told in 1 Timothy chapter 1 verse 14 that faith overflows to us by the grace of our Lord. God tells us to impart his wisdom to one another, and yet Ephesians 1 verse 17 tells us that it is the Father of glory who gives us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.

God tells us to work for one another's joy in the Lord. And yet we are told in Romans 15 verse 13 that it is God who fills us with joy, with all joy.

[9 : 15] In other words, all these things that God commands us to do, we cannot do by ourselves. But he does this, he commands us in this way, not because he wants us to fail, but because God intends to help us, because he wants us to join him in the work that he is doing.

As the 20th century evangelist Billy Graham once said, the will of God will not take us where the grace of God cannot sustain us. That's what we see going on here throughout the book of Acts.

Though the full title of the book is Acts of the Holy Apostles by Luke the Evangelist, it may aptly also be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. Because as the apostles are bearing witness to Jesus and to the Word, it's God himself who confirms their witness by his own witness.

As we bear witness to him, God authenticates our proclamation. And that's the main exhortation of today's passage, that we are to speak the gospel of grace, trusting God to authenticate the proclamation of his word.

God does this through the witness of signs, which we see in verses 1 to 10, the witness of creation, verses 11 to 18, and the witness of the suffering church in verses 19 to 28.

[10 : 43] In chapter 13, if you recall, Barnabas and Saul, who were called by God to be missionaries, were set apart and sent out by the church in Antioch.

This is the Antioch in Syria, which is different from the Antioch in Pisidia that's mentioned throughout this chapter, chapter 14. And here in chapter 14, they are entering Iconium. Iconium is the ancient name of the modern city of Konya, which is a major city in Turkey.

It was a politically important city at the time. And it says in verse 1, 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.

Paul and Barnabas, as was their custom, first entered the Jewish synagogue to preach the gospel because they know that they already have a lot of common ground with the Jews. And it says that they spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed.

So that means the manner in which they spoke was persuasive and winsome. As we will see later in verse 27, the ultimate credit for this success in their missions work belongs to God because they say that God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

[11 : 55] They just look at what God has done with us or more literally through us. But that doesn't mean that it doesn't matter how we minister.

It matters how we as God's people go about speaking the gospel of Jesus Christ. We could be winsome or we could be abrasive. We could be persuasive or we could be unpersuasive.

We could be well prepared or we could be ill prepared. We could be humble or we could be arrogant. God's sovereign work does not preclude human responsibility.

And it matters how we bear witness to Jesus. That's why he says that they spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. Paul and Barnabas were effective in their ministry.

And it says that not only the Jews but also the Greeks believed. The Greeks likely refers to the God-fearers, the Gentile God-fearers, since they were speaking in the synagogues. And you will find at times God-fearers there.

[13 : 01] God-fearers are Greeks who worshipped the God of the Jews but who had not yet fully converted to Judaism. These people were very responsive to the gospel. But it says in verse 2, The unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.

The unbelieving Jews were contradicting and slandering the Christians among the Gentiles in order to make them think badly about Christians. This happens all the time in our context as well, doesn't it?

Whether it's in the news or other media, whether it's politicians or pundits, whether it's friends or family members, it is not uncommon to find people who have settled prejudices against Christians.

Sometimes their judgments are warranted. They have seen hypocritical and terrible things done by Christians. But often, or those who claim to be Christians, but often their judgments are not warranted.

They are based on hearsay, generalizations, caricatures, suspicions, misrepresentations, and at times based on downright falsehoods.

[14 : 16] But nonetheless, they spread their judgments, and in doing so they poisoned other people's minds against Christians. That's what the unbelieving Jews in Iconium were doing.

And how did Paul and Barnabas respond to that? It says in verse 3, So, and this is surprising, 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.

This prevailing prejudice among them does not cower Paul and Barnabas into silence. Instead, they dig in their heels, recognizing that the newly converted Christians in the city need their support all the more.

And so they remained for a long time speaking boldly for the Lord. And as they did that, as they bore witness to the Lord, the Lord Himself bears witness by giving them signs and wonders.

Notice who's bearing witness in verse 3. It's not Paul and Barnabas. So they remained for a long time speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of His grace.

[15 : 27] The Lord Himself is bearing witness to the word, to His word that Paul and Barnabas are proclaiming. And He does this by granting signs and wonders. Luke is careful to know throughout the book of Acts that it is always God who performs signs and wonders.

It's never meant. God works through men to perform signs and wonders. Especially in missionary contexts where the gospel is new or foreign to the audience, God Himself often bears witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders.

But it's not. It happens here as well, it tends to be very common in missionary contexts especially. And with such signs and wonders, you might expect everyone that was there to come to faith, whose mind had been poisoned by the unbelieving Jews, that you'd think that they would all change their minds, but that's not the case.

We know this because people often say that if they were to see miracles like the ones written about in the scriptures, that they would have no trouble believing in God. But that's not true. It says in verse 4, But the people of the city were divided.

Some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. Only some respond with faith to Paul and Barnabas' teaching, even after God's witness of signs.

[16 : 46] Others still don't convert, still don't change their mind, and remain in their unbelief. And some of these who remained in their unbelief were not content to just oppose the message.

They also sought to persecute the messengers. It says in verses 5 to 7, When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews with their rulers to mistreat them and to stone them, they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, and there they continued to preach the gospel.

In Jewish context, as most of you know by now, it's been going through the book of Acts, death by stoning was reserved for blasphemers, false teachers. But the Jews, under Roman rule, did not have the authority to mete out capital punishment, so they had to get the Roman authorities involved.

But here, they partner with the Gentiles and enlist the help of their rulers in order to mistreat them and to stone them. Paul and Barnabas, however, get wind of this, probably from those who had converted and knew about the plot, and so they flee to Lystra and Derbe.

And because they just narrowly escaped serious bodily harm and possible death by stoning, and that was happening to them, that kind of persecution, because they were preaching the gospel, you might think that they would stop preaching the gospel.

[18 : 12] But it says they continued to preach the gospel in Lycaonia and to the surrounding country. Why is that? Why is that? That's because in chapter 13, who called Paul and Barnabas and sent them out on this missionary journey?

The Holy Spirit called them and sent them out. God himself called them and sent them out to preach the gospel. So they could choose to go elsewhere to preach the gospel, especially if they know that they are under mortal threat, but they cannot choose whether or not to speak or remain silent.

That's not an option that is open to them. God has called them and sent them to speak the gospel. God has called them and sent them out. God has called them and sent them out. God has called them and sent them out. So despite the hostility and danger, they continued to preach the gospel wherever they went.

No matter what kind of threats we face, no matter what kind of setbacks we experience as a church, as witnesses of Jesus Christ, we too must continue to preach the gospel.

Verses 8 to 10 relate to us what happened when Paul and Barnabas arrived in Lystra. He says, Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet.

[19 : 33] He was crippled from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, Stand upright on your feet.

And he sprang up and began walking. This is an amazing account of miraculous healing of a man lame from birth. And it parallels closely the account in chapter 3 where Peter also makes a man lame from birth walk.

Lameness, especially one that's not due to injury but from birth, was deemed incurable by the best ancient physicians. So this detail notes the severity of the man's condition and the exceptional character of this miraculous healing.

Paul noticed the lame man listening to his sermon and it says in verse 9 that he saw that he had faith to be made well. God heals in response to the faith of the lame man.

And so he tells him, commands him, Stand upright on your feet. And he sprang up and began walking. Telling a lame man who has never walked in his life to stand upright on your feet is of course crazy and foolish in human terms.

[20 : 44] But it makes sense in this context only because God is at work and God has revealed to Paul he intends to heal this man. And it says he sprang up and began walking.

It's a complete miraculous healing. I mentioned when we were in chapter 3 that this was a fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 35 verse 6 that in the messianic age that the lame man shall leap like a deer.

Jesus fulfilled that prophecy and now the Lord Jesus continues to make the lame leap like a deer through the hands of his apostles. And speaking of apostles, note that in verse 4 and in verse 14 Paul and Barnabas are called apostles.

Which shows that traveling missionaries other than the 12 apostles were also sometimes called apostles in the early church. Luke normally reserves that title for the 12 but here in chapter 14 after Paul and Barnabas were commissioned for their missionary journey in chapter 13 right at the juncture where the focus of the book of Acts shifts from Peter's missionary work to Paul's missionary work Luke intentionally attributes the title apostle to Paul and Barnabas.

Similarly, he intentionally recounts a miracle that is very similar to the miracle that Peter performed early in chapter 3 and I think he's doing this all of this intentionally as a way of certifying to his audience to his readers to his hearers that Paul and Barnabas are genuine apostles who preach the same apostolic message of the 12 apostles.

[22 : 31] We must remember that that is our call also to preach that same apostolic message. We do not have the option of choosing for ourselves what message to preach.

There are too many people in the world who claim to be Christians or claim to be a follower of Jesus and yet deny the very gospel that Jesus himself entrusted to his 12 apostles.

They should freely admit instead that they are innovators inventors of a new religion rather than laying claim on historic Christianity. True Christians are disciples of Jesus Christ who preach the same gospel that he himself entrusted to his 12 apostles.

That's why Acts 2.42 said that the early Christians were devoted to the apostles' teaching and it is this apostolic gospel that God himself authenticates by granting signs and wonders.

In addition to the witness of signs we see the witness of creation in verses 11 to 18. It says in verses 11 to 13 and when the crowd 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.

[23 : 46] Barnabas they called Zeus and Paul Hermes because he was the chief speaker 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 sacrifices with the crowds.

Luke notes that the crowds here were not speaking Greek but actually speaking Lycaonian even though after Alexander the Great conquered this region around 334-333 BC Greek became the language of the people.

Some of the indigenous languages still survived for a time and as you can see here one of them was Lycaonian. The Greeks mocked foreign speech as sounding like bar, bar, bar, bar, bar and so that's why they were called barbarians.

And they called all foreigners barbarians so Lycaonians were barbarians. And soon thereafter in history the word barbarian took on deeply pejorative connotations because many prideful Greeks viewed foreigners as uncivilized and uncultured.

But even while the Greeks made such distinction the early church did not make only the Jews and Greeks the object of their missionary efforts. They went to every nation even to the so-called barbarians.

[25 : 07] So Paul says in Romans 1 verse 14 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians. In Colossians chapter 3 verse 11 he writes that in Christ there is not Greek and Jew circumcised and uncircumcised barbarians Scythians slave free but Christ is all and in all.

We see this universal principle at work here. Paul and Barnabas make no distinction between Jew and Gentile between Greek and barbarian. They preach the gospel indiscriminately to all because it's the only message that saves.

Unfortunately however the crowds in Lystra conclude that Paul and Barnabas are gods who have come down in the likeness of men. They are right to conclude that healing a man who is lame from birth is something that only a divine being can do.

They were correct in their conclusion. But they were wrong to conclude that it was in fact Paul and Barnabas themselves who have done this. We know from verse 3 that it was God who was granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

And it's this misunderstanding that makes the crowd hail Paul as Hermes and Barnabas as Zeus. These people worshipped Zeus as the chief god the sky father as they called him their highest god.

[26 : 34] They believed that Zeus gathered rain and sent gathered clouds and then sent rain and lightning and thunder. They also worshipped Hermes whom they said was Zeus' son.

Hermes served as the messenger of Zeus who traversed lands of the living and the dead. And since they believed that Hermes served as Zeus' mouthpiece they conclude that Paul must be Hermes because he is talking the most.

There was a local legend in that area at the time that two gods had wandered among people in their region. and the legend goes that nobody offered these two gods any hospitality until Philemon and Bousis an older couple did.

Subsequently the gods rewarded the couple and made them priests in the temple of Zeus and punished the other people who showed them no hospitality. This is a legend that was circulating at the time.

And considering this it's easy to see how this grave misunderstanding about Paul and Barnabas arose. the people of Lystra don't want to miss another opportunity to show hospitality to the gods.

[27 : 44] And so they go and fetch the priest of Zeus who brings oxen and garlands to the gates to offer sacrifice with the crowds. Barnabas and Paul are not happy about this of course it says in verse 14 but when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd.

If they were charlatans out for their own glory and profit they would have basked in their newfound glory and fame. But because they were apostles messengers sent out by God accountable to God they are deeply upset and they show their indignation by tearing their garments they cry out in verse 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.

We're humans we're mortals just like you why are you doing these things? What they assume of course is the truth that only a divine being is worthy of worship.

Human beings are not worthy of worship. After communicating this Paul and Barnabas tell the people that they are merely messengers who bring good news the news that you should turn from these vain things to a living God.

[29 : 16] There's some major implications to what they're saying because the implication of course is that the gods that these people of Lystra worship are not living. They're inanimate imaginary beings.

There is one creator of the cosmos and he alone deserves to be worshipped and so they're correcting them. I think if we're honest with ourselves we still have this tendency to deify human beings.

Look at the Olympics for example. The Olympics first started in ancient Greece as a display of religious devotion and worship to none other than Zeus.

Athletes paraded into the stadium past the line of priests and frequently dedicated their performance to their respected patron gods. And then winners received olive reeds made from trees in a grove that was dedicated to Zeus.

and these winning athletes thereafter were revered like demigods people who had been touched by divinity and have transcended the status of mere mortals.

- [30 : 30] The ancient Olympic games were abolished in 393 by Theodosius I who was a Christian emperor who wanted to end the pagan rituals. It was resumed in 1896 ironically by another Christian man who tried to Christianize it and sanitize it and give people opportunities to develop holistic holiness or whatnot by exercising and excelling in physical activities.

And nowadays it's mostly secularized but it's still kind of like a secularized civic religion of sorts with its own ceremonies rituals oaths.

Sometimes people use adjectives like divine to describe people's performances. And athletes who are particularly dominant in their sport are revered almost like divine superhuman figures.

This phenomenon is not limited to the Olympic athletes. Other famous athletes movie stars etc. are sought out for endorsements. Statues are made of them.

People pay homage to them. Stand in all of them. And their paraphernalia are sold for millions of dollars. Perhaps this is not surprising because human beings are created in the image of God.

- [31 : 54] We were created to represent Him and resemble Him. This is why Jewish tradition forbade the visual depiction of even human beings in art.

Even when they were not objects of worship because they judged that it came perilously close to idolatry considering that human beings are made in the glorious image of God. But no matter how much of a genius a person might be or how seemingly superhuman their athletic feats might be, we must remember that they are just men.

Humans like you and me. How many of us, I wonder, if we were afforded an opportunity to have dinner with or even just take a selfie with Alison Felix or Caleb Dressel or LeBron James or Lionel Messi or Robert Downey Jr. or Scarlett Johansson or Ed Sheeran or Ariana Grande would skip Sunday worship in a heartbeat to do so.

Do we really realize that when we worship we are in the presence of the living God who created the heavens and the earth? Do we realize that here God personally speak to us from his word?

Do we realize that the very spirit of God fills us more and more as we sing praises to him? Do we God? Do we know that how many of us spend more hours and days admiring mere humans, learning about mere humans, following mere humans, and watching mere humans than the one true God?

- [33 : 52] How many of us aspire to be like them? To be famous, to be adored and respected and paid like demigods? It's easy to dismiss the people of Lystra as gullible and superstitious, but we moderns are actually not all that different.

Men, why are you doing these things? They are mere mortals. We are mere humans. And here's the good news that we should cling to.

Instead, we may turn from these vain things to a living God. Worship of false gods is vain. It is worthless, useless.

They have no power to make a lame man walk. They have no power to make the sinner clean. They have no power to make those who are spiritually dead alive again. Only God can do that.

Paul continues his message in verse 16. In past generations, he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Prior to the coming of Jesus, the various nations worshipped other gods, and God certainly didn't approve of their idolatry, but he didn't interfere with it.

[35 : 15] He allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways, it says. However, now, with the coming of Jesus and the commissioning of his apostles, those times have come to an end.

Now, we are to make disciples of all nations. Now, all nations are commended to repent of their sinful ways and turn to the only true God. Now, we are to be witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

God . But even in past generations, it says in verse 17, God 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.

Here, Paul is directly confronting the Lycaonian and Greek traditions, because they believe that Zeus provided rain, but Zeus is no God at all. It has always been the Lord God who has provided them rain for the earth, and they should have known that, Paul says.

For Zeus was a figment of the human imagination. He was a God who was created in the image of man, not the God who created man in his image. Paul argues that God has left us a witness in his creation.

[36 : 36] Farmers in the ancient world tilled the ground and planted seeds, but it was God who shone the sun, it was God who rained down water, it was God who made the plants grow.

God has woven into, woven our creaturely dependence on the creator, he has woven that reality, that dependence right into the fabric of the fabric of the universe, so that from the beginning our very survival depended on things that were outside of our control.

all creation in this sense bears witness to God, tells us about God. Paul says something very similar in Romans 1, 19 to 20, he says, for what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them.

For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made, so they are without excuse.

The heavens declare the glory of God, the sky proclaim his handiwork. work. There are 19 independent fundamental physical constants that keep the world running.

[37 : 59] That's about all I know about them, so if you really want to know more about them, ask the physicists in our church. But the speed of light, the gravitational constant, the electric constant, if any one of these constants were off by even one part in a million, or some of them one part in a million, million, the universe would cease to exist as we know it, and our lives would not be possible.

The sovereign God has fine-tuned this universe so that we might live in it. All creation bears witness to God, and yet so many people in the world live without honoring God as God.

They have exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal men and birds and animals and creeping things. Instead of worshiping the creator, they worship the creatures.

Instead of looking to God as their provider, they look to the products he has made to provide for them. Instead of looking to God as the giver of all good gifts, we enjoy his gifts without acknowledging the one who has graciously given them all to us.

This is the folly of unbelief. What are the vain, empty things in your life you're tempted to turn to instead of turning to God?

[39 : 29] In what ways have the creatures displaced the creator in your life as the central object of affection and aspiration?

This is human folly that is difficult to tame and so it says in verse 18 even with these words they scarcely restrain the people from offering sacrifice to them.

So God authenticates the truth of his word with the witness of signs and with the witness of creation and we also see in verses 19 to 28 that God authenticates his word by the witness of the suffering church.

Paul and Barnabas just barely succeeded in restraining the people of Lystra from offering sacrifice to them and worshiping them but then look at what happens in verse 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 the crowds that not long ago were blaspheming hailing Paul and Barnabas to be gods are now persuaded by the unbelieving Jews who had come from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium to stone Paul which is the punishment reserved for blasphemers how fickle people are this is why we must ultimately look to God and depend on him and not on man the crowds that turn to you can just as quickly turn against you apparently Paul has sustained significant injuries because the mob leaves him for dead they think he could be dead but

God did not have it in his plans to have Paul die that day so it says in verse 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 it seems like Paul may have done some great acting possibly he was surrounded by the disciples and then it says he rose up and entered the city and since he was well enough to travel on the following day his injury probably was not critical and of course what else do you expect them to do when they arrive next in Derbe it says in verses 21 to 22 when they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch strengthening the souls of the disciples encouraging them to continue in the faith and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of

[42 : 13] God this narrative is written with no dramatic flair it's just straightforward reporting and yet I find this account so moving having preached the gospel in Derbe Paul and Barnabas returned the way they came back to Lystra where Paul was stoned back to Iconium and to Pisidian Antioch where they were driven out by hostile crowds why did they take this risky route back it says in verse 22 that they were strengthening the souls of the disciples encouraging them to continue in the faith and saying that through many tribulations we must enter kingdom of God when you repent of your sins and believe in Jesus Christ and you are baptized you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and you are born again into the family of God that's what it means to become a

Christian but just as a mother after giving birth to a child doesn't say my work is done good luck with the rest of your life but instead takes the child nurses the child takes care of the child until he has matured into adulthood being born again into the family of God is only the beginning of the Christian life baptism is the starting line not the finish line and we as Christians are supposed to grow and mature in Christ likeness for the rest of our lives and it is for this reason that Paul and Barnabas take pains to revisit the churches that they have planted the believers that they have gathered them to these cities so that they might strengthen their souls and encourage them to continue in the faith those in the church need to be encouraged to continue in the faith because not all do there are people who by every appearance seem to be

Christian and yet fall away from the faith thereby proving that they didn't belong to Christ after all so we must encourage one another spur on one another and strengthen one another and that's the role of the local church it says in verse 23 that when they had appointed elders for them in every church with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed Paul and Barnabas organized the converts from their evangelistic efforts and they gathered them together and then appoint elders for them to lead them to exercise authority over them so that they might function as local churches this is the way God has designed Christians to grow and persevere in faith and obedience it doesn't happen in isolation it doesn't happen without the proper leadership structure that God himself has instituted and notice the preposition that he uses they appointed elders for them in every church for them that's for their benefit for their blessing those who exercise authority in the church as elders do not exist to enrich or indulge themselves they exist for the church people often see authority only as a privilege replete with prerogatives and perks something that everyone wants to have but

Christian authority in particular is more a service full of humiliations and self denials something that I think most people if they really saw what it entailed if they really saw it for what it is I think most people would not want it for themselves so Paul and Barnabas appoint elders for the benefit of the church and with prayer and fasting commit them to the Lord and then after visiting the cities where they had preached they returned to Antioch says in verse 26 this is the original Antioch that sent them in Syria where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled and when they arrived and gathered the church together they declared all that God had done with them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles and they remained no little time with the disciples they go back to the church that sent them in order to give an account of their missionary journey to report back to them because he knew they knew that they were accountable to that church that sent them missionaries are not solo

Christians but extensions of the local churches that send them and they are supported by them and report back to them and we need the teaching and strengthening and encouraging that take place in the context of the local church because as it says in verse 22 God has ordained that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God this is the way that God has ordained for people to enter the kingdom of God it only happens through many tribulations in 2nd Timothy 3 chapter 10 to chapter 3 verses 10 to 12 I think I have it to project for you guys Paul is describing to Timothy how he as a true servant of the Lord is different from the false teachers who have the appearance of godliness and this is how he distinguishes them Paul says you have followed my teaching my conduct my aim in life my faith my patience my love my steadfastness but that's not all he says my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at

[48 : 31] Antioch at Iconium and at Lystra which persecutions I endured yet from them all the Lord rescued me indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted Paul considered the sufferings and persecutions he endured for the Lord's sake to be the bona fides of his apostleship you want to know how I'm a true apostle of the Lord Jesus look at how I've suffered look at how I was stoned in Lystra look at how I've been persecuted look at how I'm driven out of every city I go to preach the gospel his sufferings bore witness to the gospel because it is a genuine gospel and those who preach Christ to a world that is in rebellion against Christ will be persecuted it's not a question of when it's not a question of if it's a question of when but you don't have to worry about that as we speak the gospel of grace we can trust

God to authenticate the proclamation of his word it is God's job to bear witness with signs bear witness with his creation bear witness through our suffering it's our job to proclaim it that's why there's such an emphasis in this passage in this entire passage on the act of proclaiming the gospel just scan the passage with me repeats words and phrases like speaking the word preaching the gospel bearing witness it uses those words and phrases eight times throughout the passage because no matter what obstacles stand in the way this is a mission that we may not forfeit because it is the mission given to us by God to discharge no matter how much pressure we face this is a message that we may not distort for it is the message given to us by God to proclaim that

Jesus is the Christ the King the Messiah the Son of God who came and lived the life of perfect holiness and died his death on the cross to bear the punishment for our sins that he was raised for our vindication for our justification to give us eternal life the only message that saves message by which we have been born again into the family of God the message only because of which we have this relationship with our loving father that's the gospel message we preach that's why it is called the word of his grace in verse three the word of God's grace because it's a gift because it's something that we never earned or deserved we were sinners who had forsaken our relationship with

God who had abandoned our worship of God our allegiance to God and we rightly deserve the word of judgment the word of condemnation but instead we received the word of his grace his favor his mercy all because of God's love for us all because of what God accomplished for us in Jesus Christ on the cross brothers and sisters there is no higher cause there is no greater message so let us go to all the nations speak the gospel of his grace trusting God himself to authenticate the proclamation of his word please take a moment in silence to reflect on this and to ask yourself what the Holy Spirit is highlighting for you bringing to your attention and after you've done that we're going to respond together by praying as a church out loud out and button everywhere has us to