

We Must Endure Hardships!

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, everyone. Great to see you all this morning. Well, this morning we are continuing our series in the Book of Acts. We're picking up from where we left off last week.

And that means this morning we're coming to chapter 14. We're going to be looking at verses 21 to 28. And in our verses this morning, Paul and Barnabas are returning to some towns and villages that they once previously visited.

And they're seeking to encourage the believers in these towns and villages. And they do this by really highlighting one very important truth. And that's what we're going to look at this morning. And I've asked Daniela if she'll come and read our passage for us this morning. So thank you so much, Danny, for doing that for us. Thanks. Acts 14, verses 21 to 28.

They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconian, and Antioch, in strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith.

[1 : 1 5] We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God, they said. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church, and with prayer and fasting committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, and they had preached the word in Perga. They went down to Italia.

From Italia, they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them, and now he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

And they stayed there a long time with the disciples. Well, thank you, Danny.

Well, there is a teaching out there, and it's a false teaching, that once someone becomes a believer, if they have enough faith, and if they ask for it, well, then life should be nothing but perfect, prosperity, health, wealth, and smooth sailing.

[2 : 3 7] There is a teaching out there that seems to be connected to the prosperity gospel, that once you become a believer, if you have enough faith and you ask for it, well, then life should be completely free of trials and hardships, and everything should be only physical, material, financial, prosperity, and smooth sailing.

Well, I wonder what the Apostle Paul would have thought of this teaching. I wonder what the Apostle Paul would have thought of the prosperity gospel.

I want to read just a few verses from 2 Corinthians chapter 11, starting from verse 23.

And these are Paul's words. For the sake of Christ, I have worked the hardest, been imprisoned the most, been flogged severely, and been exposed to death again and again.

Five times I received from the Jews the 40 lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was pelted with stones.

[4 : 0 0] Three times I was shipwrecked. I spent a night and a day in the open sea. I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea, and in danger from false believers.

I have labored and toiled, and have often gone without sleep. I have known hunger and thirst, and have often gone without food. I have been cold and naked.

Besides everything else, I face the daily pressure of my concern for all the churches. This passage is known as Paul's Catalogue of Suffering.

And I did my best to try to make this look like a catalogue. And I just want to invite us, just for a few moments, to take this in this morning.

I think what strikes me when I look at this list is Paul endured so many things, but there are some things he endured multiple times, like five times the 40 lashes minus one, three times beaten with rods, three times shipwrecked.

[5 : 27] And it seems that he was in danger from absolutely every single thing you could imagine. If anyone had great faith, it was the Apostle Paul.

If anyone believed in God, it was Paul. If anyone prayed in faith, it was Paul. If anyone did things in the name of Jesus, it was Paul.

So if anyone deserved only prosperity, health, and wealth, it was the mighty Apostle Paul. Paul. But that clearly was not Paul's experience.

Paul, with his great faith, did not experience in this life only perfect health, wealth, and prosperity with only smooth sailing.

No, he knew many, many challenges in this life. He knew some good times as well. But he experienced many hardships in this life.

[6 : 39] Paul did not experience this prosperity gospel, nor did he preach it. In fact, we see in our verses this morning, tucked away in Acts chapter 14, that he preached something very different.

He taught something very different. Because in our verses this morning, Paul, along with Barnabas, told the believers in the towns that they revisited, that we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.

These are the only words in this passage that were given that Paul and Barnabas directly said to these churches. This is the only quote, it's the only statement we're given in this passage in relation to what Paul and Barnabas actually said to these churches.

We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God. I think with these words, Paul rejects any idea that the life of a believer should always only be perfect, smooth sailing.

Rather, we see in these, with these words, that Paul and Barnabas, I think, are making it clear that as believers, we must and will experience hardships.

[8 : 09] to enter the kingdom of God. And let me say that Paul and Barnabas are not saying here that we must go through hardships in order to be saved.

That's not what these words mean by we must go through hardships in order to enter the kingdom of God. It's not by hardships that we are saved.

Now what they are saying here is as believers, when we are saved, we are living in a fallen world and so as we journey through this world, as we journey towards our heavenly home, on that journey, we cannot and will not avoid hardships.

As believers living in this fallen world, we cannot expect that life will be only health, wealth, prosperity, and only smooth sailing because nowhere in scripture are we promised that.

Instead, we're told here and it's touched on in other places that through this life, we will go through many hardships. hardships. Well folks, there you go.

[9 : 29] That's our encouraging news for this morning. Our encouraging news this morning from Paul and Barnabas is we must all go through hardships. I don't hear many of us shouting at this point, you know, woohoo!

I think as we look at these verses, as you look at these words, you know, does it come to mind in response to these words like, you know, yes, you know, how wonderful, how amazing.

I don't think that that is naturally our response to these words. But folks, what is fascinating about these words is that these words are actually said very much to be an encouragement to the believers that Paul and Barnabas were talking to.

These words are intended to be a strengthening thing to the believers that Paul and Barnabas were talking to. We see in verse 22 that these words are said by Paul and Barnabas in the context of seeking to encourage and strengthen the believers in these towns, in these churches to remain true to the faith.

So even though it may perhaps not look like it on the surface, these words on the screen, they're meant to be an encouragement, they're meant to strengthen, and they're meant to strengthen and encourage us this morning also.

[11 : 10] So very briefly, as we look at these words here, I want to ask the question, how do these words here encourage us and strengthen us?

I just want to share three simple strengthening encouragements from these words. First, these words help us not to be surprised by hardships.

There's a big difference, I think, in how we react to something if we kind of know that something might come rather than if we don't and we're completely caught off guard when it happens. When something comes that we don't expect, it can at times completely rock us and knock us off balance. I remember a couple of years ago I was out in the garden and I was out there kind of playing with the kids and trying to do something. I think we were digging something. And at one point I was kind of crouching over and one of them came to kind of run and jump.

I'd like to think they were giving me a hug but they were probably just coming to, you know, jump on me. But I didn't see them coming at all. You know, their feet on the grass is like stealthy.

[12:31] You know, they came up behind me. I did not see them at all. And with just a simple little jump up on me I completely was knocked over. I was like on my back like a turtle.

I didn't see them coming. I didn't have any time to plant my feet or to kind of get ready for impact. And I was completely knocked off balance.

Well, I think that for us as believers to some degree facing hardships is similar. And I'm not saying we go around the place expecting something bad to happen every 30 seconds.

You know, we go around the place doom and gloom expecting there to be trouble behind every corner. But on the other hand, if we do not expect any trials or any challenges in our Christian walk, we are in danger of being completely knocked off balance when hardships do come.

when we know something might come and will come, we are in a better and stronger place to face it. So these words are helpful to us.

[13:52] These words can encourage us and can strengthen us because these words help us to know that hardships will come. These words help us to know that when hardships come, it's not that there's something wrong with us or it's not that there's something very strange happening.

We're told hardships will be part of our Christian walk. And knowing that, even if we know that a little bit more, even if we expect hardships a small bit more, it will help us to face them when they do come.

Well, second, another strengthening encouragement from these words, these words help us to see that we are not alone in going through hardships. I think the word we hear in these words is interesting.

I think the word we hear reminds us that it's not just you or it's not just me who will experience hardships. We will all go through hardships.

We are all in the same boat, you know. Hardships will come to all of us. We all experience hardships. And there is something, in a roundabout way, I think, very encouraging about that.

[15:10] I was talking to someone recently, someone here in West Cork, and they have cancer and they were told that they have cancer. And they said that they find great encouragement in meeting other folks who are currently going through hardships as well because it makes them feel like they're not alone and others are struggling too.

And there's a sense of encouragement when they kind of come together and see that, you know, I'm not the only one in the world who is struggling. We have each other.

We're all going through hardships. That means we can encourage each other. We can relate to each other. We can pray for each other. We have each other. And of course, we have the Lord, who will be with us, holding us in his hand through whatever it is that might come our way. He might not take the hardship away, but he'll be holding our hand and we'll be in his hand as we walk through the hardship.

These words help us to see that we are all in the same boat. It's not just that a few of us will have hardships. We will all have hardships.

[16:24] Well, finally, just one more thing. These words help us to remember that for us as believers, hardships are not forever.

Yes, these words tell us that there will be many hardships in this life, but let that reality remind us that hardships will only be in this life.

Yes, as believers, we will endure hardships as we journey to our heavenly home, but there will be no more hardships when we get to our heavenly home.

We're going to that place where there's no more mourning or crying or pain or suffering. Our hardships are not forever and they will be nothing compared to what is to come.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4, 17, for our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

[17 : 33] The blessing it is that we're going to a place where there's no more suffering and the glory of that place will outweigh every hardship and pain and trouble that we have in this life.

Our hardships are not forever. Somehow, these words can remind us of that. Folks, let us not be fooled by the prosperity gospel.

There will be hardships in this life. This life is not going to be perfect health, wealth, prosperity and smooth sailing all of the time.

There will be hardships. As sure as rain is wet, there will be hardships. Someone said that to me this past week. They said, as sure as rain is wet, something will happen.

As sure as rain is wet, I can pretty much guarantee every single one of us will endure hardships. Or someone said, I think the other way I'm putting it, as sure as debt and taxes, there will be hardships.

[18 : 49] That will be part of our story. But when hardships come, let us not be shocked. Let us not be completely knocked off balance.

When hardships come our way, let us not think that we're alone. And when hardships come our way, let us not think that they will last forever. Let us instead be encouraged and strengthened from these words here in Acts 14, 22.

That hardships are part of life. When hardships come our way, it's not because there's something wrong with us. Hardships are part of life. And let us be encouraged that we are not alone.

We have each other. And we have the Lord. And let us be encouraged that hardships will not last forever. Yes, we will have hardships as we journey to our heavenly home.

But they will not last forever. because for us believers, the best is yet to come. And we can hold on to that through all the things that we face.

[20 : 11] So even though these words might, on first glance, not seem that encouraging and strengthening, Paul and Barnabas cared for these believers so much that they would tell them the truth.

And to really care for someone is to tell them the truth. Paul and Barnabas cared for them so much that they told them the truth, that there would be hardships, that hardships would be part of their story.

And the truth is, as I said, it will be part of our story too. But there is encouragement and there is strength we can get from this truth.

These words help us to expect hardships, they help us to know that we're not alone, and they help us to see that we are not going to be enduring hardships forever. Well then, in a further act of care, just to say briefly, in a further act of care for these believers, we see in the rest of our passage that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in each place that they visited, who would be part of helping these believers in these different places to go through the hardships that they would face.

Elders have a role to play in seeking to encourage believers through hardships by praying for them and by encouraging them in the truth.

[21 : 54] And let me just say, I think on behalf of the elders, we can only do our best with the Lord's help in doing that. So as an extension of their care for these believers, Paul and Barnabas, with prayer and fasting, appointed elders to help care for the church.

And then in verses 26 to 28, we see that Paul and Barnabas would continue to travel to the next place, to keep spreading the gospel, to keep establishing churches, and to keep encouraging believers in the truth.

And that's where we'll pick it up next time when we come back to the book of Acts. Let's pray together. Lord, we thank you for your word again, and we thank you for what your word teaches us, and we thank you for this little passage that's tucked in Acts chapter 14.

And we thank you for the important reminder that we cannot expect this life to be perfect health, wealth, and prosperity.

That is not what we are promised. Instead, Lord, we are told that we will endure hardships, and when we think of the hardships that you endured in your life, we can rejoice knowing that we have a Savior who can relate to us.

[23 : 21] And we thank you for that. Lord, as we go through this life, we know that there will be challenges, but we thank you that we have each other, and we thank you that you are holding our hand, and we're being held by you through each and every thing that we face.

And Lord, we thank you for the hope that we have as believers that the rest of the world simply does not have, the hope that the best is yet to come, the certain knowledge that the best is yet to

come. And we thank you that this is so true.

We thank you that we are going to a heavenly home where sufferings and hardships will be left behind, and forever and ever we will only know joy and joy to the full.

faithful. So we thank you for this certain hope that we have, and may these things help us to be steady and to be wise as we move forward through this life.

And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

[24 : 28] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.