

Faithful through Tribulation - Acts 14:8-28

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[0 : 00] I'm grateful that you have come to worship Him today, and today we will have opportunity to look at His Word here in a moment. But before we do so, I want to share something that I know to be true about you who are in Christ.

Those of us who are in Christ, we desire to be faithful gospel witnesses. We do. And it is the mission of every church to be His witness in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. It is our mission of the church. And there are things today, five things that we're going to look at, five aspects of being a faithful gospel witness that we will learn as Paul and Barnabas conclude the first missionary journey.

If you're a guest with us today, we have been looking at Paul's first missionary journey, how they left Antioch and went to the island of Cyprus, then turned north to modern-day Turkey, Asia Minor, going to Perga, Antioch, Iconium.

And today, we're going to look, as they leave Iconium, they're going to look to go to Lystra and then to Derby today. So if you have your copy of God's word, we're going to look at Acts chapter 14 and look at starting in verse 8 to 18 is going to be our first text.

[1 : 28] And then I'll read verses later as well. Acts chapter 14, 8 through 18. 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, seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, stand up on your feet. And he sprang up and began walking. And when the crowd saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices saying in Iconium, the gods have come down to us in likeness of men.

Barnabas was called Zeus and Paul Hermes because he was the chief speaker. Even the priests of Zeus, who temple was at the entrance of the city, brought oxen and garland to the gate and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.

But when the apostle 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?

[2 : 36] We also are men of like nature with you. And we bring good news that you should turn from these vain things to a living God who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.

In past generations, he allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave him without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.

Even with these things, they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifices to them. We're looking at five aspects of being a faithful gospel witness.

And so it requires a few things. The first one we're going to look at today is being a faithful gospel witness requires perseverance in proclaiming the gospel.

Let's remind ourselves. Before we get into that, I want to share a little bit about the community of Lystra that they're now in. It was a frontier outpost. Caesar Augusta had made it a Roman colony in 6 BC, establishing it as the eastern most fortified city of the Roman Empire in that region of Galatia.

[3 : 57] It would have had the flavor of kind of the old West. Most of the populace were uneducated, can't use estimates that there were probably illiterate people, and they had their own Lyconian language.

And the people, some would even say were half barbarous. And so the Romans ruled the land, Greeks controlled the commerce, and the Jews had little influence.

If you note, this is the first community they go to where they do not go to a synagogue. There were not enough Jews to keep synagogue. And so there was though a family of Jewish origin in this

community.

This is where Timothy is from. So his mother and grandmother, we know to be Jewish people. And now we turn to these aspects of being a gospel witness, perseverance in proclaiming the gospel. Let's think for a moment the recent history of where they just came from. In Antioch, they were pushed out of Antioch because of the persecution.

[5 : 13] In Iconium, they learned that there was a death threat on their life, and so they fled for the sake of their own life, leaving Iconium.

And then they come to Lystra, and they begin proclaiming the gospel. But wouldn't you, why do I say perseverance in proclaiming the gospel?

You know that if you just be quiet, all of this persecution goes away. And yet they go from one community to the next community with persecution, with persecution, and they continue to proclaim the gospel, because being a faithful gospel witness requires perseverance in proclaiming the gospel.

Catch the scene. There in Lystra, there in the city, and there's a man who has never walked. And Paul is preaching. He says, and Paul was speaking in verse 9. So he's proclaiming God's word. He is preaching, and there is a man that's listening where they can't almost not make eye contact.

[6 : 24] And it's evident to Paul that God is doing something in this man's life because it says in the text, and Paul looking intently at him, and seeing that he had faith to be made well.

God was doing something in this man. Paul recognized it and asked the man, stand to your feet, and he sprang up and began walking.

And can you imagine everyone around knowing this man has never walked since birth, and all of a sudden he is now walking as if he had never been lame. He has been made whole in that sense. Have you grown tired of sharing your faith? Have you forgotten or neglected your responsibility in sharing your faith? Have you been rejected and have you grown disheartened?

I want to encourage us today, persevere in sharing the gospel, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. The great commission says that we shall be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.

[7 : 38] So being a faithful gospel witness requires persevering and proclaiming the gospel of Christ. Secondly, being a faithful gospel witness requires an intense deflection of glory.

Verses 11 through 15a, something very interesting happens. If I were Paul and Barnabas and the man was healed and he began walking, I would love to have begun to talk to everyone listening. Look, let me share with you about the doctrine of man. And let me tell you about the story of the incarnation of Christ and the atoning work of Christ on the cross and the necessity of faith.

And I could imagine in my mind's eye the amount of people who would come to faith in Christ, but none of that is present. Because in their ignorance, the locals respond wrongly.

And to help us understand why they responded wrongly, it's helpful for us to understand a little legend that was in this region. Because they accuse Barnabas of being Zeus and Paul being Hermes.

[8 : 53] It's helpful for us to understand why is that so. The legend has it that was ingrained in the culture there in this town.

It would have been known that this is the legend. Zeus and Hermes were once in this hill country disguised as mortals and they were seeking lodging. And they asked a thousand homes, could we stay with you?

Could we stay with you? And all a thousand of them turned them away. But finally they came upon a humble cottage and there were a poor elderly couple whose names were Philemon and Bacchus. And they freely welcomed Zeus and Hermes to stay with them and eat their meager means of food that they could provide. And in appreciation for this, Zeus and Hermes transformed that cottage into a great temple.

And the couple were made priests and priestesses. And when that couple had died, they were immortalized by this great oak tree and a great linden tree.

[9 : 57] The inhospitable homes though who rejected Zeus and Hermes from staying with them were destroyed. And so can you imagine, you just hear these two strangers come into town.

You have this in your mind of this folklore that exists and about Zeus and Hermes and do you think you're not going to respond well?

And they do things, something happened that only apparently God's can do, this man who was born lame now walks freely. And you would likely, just like me, in ignorance respond wrongly.

So before they could proclaim much more about the gospel quickly, what do we see the community doing? The priest grabs some oxen and there he goes off to the temple that's at the city gate and they're going to sacrifice and they brought garlands and they're going to worship Paul and Barnabas as Zeus and Hermes.

And yet there is this incredible, and they don't understand right away what is initially happening. Paul and Barnabas don't realize exactly what all is happening because they're speaking their Lyconian language.

[11:16] This says in verse 11, Barnabas being Zeus is the chief God was probably because Barnabas was older but also Hermes being the spokesperson or the messenger of the pantheon of God was Paul and so they likened him to be Hermes.

What started off as a day with great promise is turning quickly and imagine the scene. The townspeople are now gravitating toward the city gate where the temple is, where they're going to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas and they rushed out into the crowd.

Verse 14, and when Paul and Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and they rushed in the crowd crying out.

They wanted to, once they understood what all was happening, once they understood the consequence of this, they wanted to stop it immediately. They tore their clothes as a sign of great distress and a sign of perceived blasphemy that we read in Mark 14:63 and they are urging the people to stop.

And in this moment, they break out into a response. This is Paul's first sermon to a purely pagan audience, to a purely lost, Gentile audience.

[12:51] And John Stott proposes that they are mostly illiterate. And notice how he begins his sermon. How does he convince them? How does Paul and Barnabas say, don't do this.

Do not recognize us as gods? He says in verse 15, men, why are you doing these things? We also are men of the same nature with you and we bring good news.

We are of the same nature. We are of the same substance. They are pleading for them to stop. In Romans 1, 21, we find out perhaps why they're even doing this.

It says this about those without Christ. They became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened.

They're deflecting the glory that only belongs to the Lord and they maintain this creature and creator distinction. We are men of the same nature. We are the same substance.

[13:54] We are not gods. We are not creators. We are like you. We are mere humans. There's a strong aversion, strong deflection to receive any glory that belongs to God.

They didn't heal this man, but God did through their hands. In fact, if you look back what they did in Iconium, it's clear who is doing the healing. Look with me in verse 3, back in Iconium, the previous town.

14 verse 3, so they remained a long time speaking boldly for the Lord who, and this is the Lord, who bore witness to the word of His grace.

So the Lord, as Paul and Barnabas are proclaiming the word of God, God is bearing witness to the grace that they are speaking of, to His grace.

And how does He do this? God is granting Paul and Barnabas, it says, signs and wonders to be done at their hands. So Paul and Barnabas are preaching and proclaiming the gospel that saves.

[14:59] God is, it says, bearing witness to His word of grace that Paul and Barnabas are speaking, and He does that by enabling Paul and Barnabas to heal.

But it's God who heals. And just the so, just the same here, God is the one who healed this man. And so Paul and Barnabas are saying, listen, we're men just like you.

We didn't do this. We're the same flesh, same nature. I wonder if Paul and Barnabas had a strong deflection of glory when they maybe think about Nebuchadnezzar, who centuries before boasted saying, is this not the great Babylon which I have built by my mighty power and the royal residence for the glory of my majesty?

And we know what happened in Nebuchadnezzar. The Lord spoke to him and said, the kingdom has departed from you and you will be driven out among men in your dwelling and shall be with beasts in the field.

When as humans we take that which only belongs to the Lord, it is the highest handed sin we could accomplish. All glory belongs to Lord.

[16:19] In our mission statement here at the church, we want to make disciples who are transformed by the gospel for the glory of God. Any maturity that any of us have in this church as we grow into likeness of Christ, it's all for his glory.

It's done by his empowerment and it is all for his glory. Not necessarily for a teacher or for a pastor, an elder.

We're grateful to be used, but it is not for our glory that anything good would come from Fourth Memorial Church. There are subtle forms of this that we groom ourselves as children as we grow up and we may not recognize what we're doing entirely when we grow up.

Would parents be mindful of this when we can take credit for something that belongs to another?

This is why plagiarism is so offensive for those in college and after college and school.

This is why receiving gratitude and praise for something when others had a major part in doing something. Yesterday it blessed me, I attended a party and the host of the party was being expressed gratitude for something and the host said, oh, but I got that idea from somebody else and they deflected it.

[17:54] And I thought, that's so beautiful. This is, that's so beautiful. When you're commended or you're complimented and praised for something that you did, when you know others helped you, do you receive it or do you quickly give praise to others?

Do you find it easy to express gratitude to our God when someone compliments you and someone says something nice to you, you can say thank you, that's fine, but it's also thank you, the Lord has been good to me.

Lord, thank you. Do you take credit for your children walking with God? Do you take credit for your spouse who humbly walks with God? These are gifts from the Lord and may we be grateful for them.

I appreciate Romans 4, Revelation 4, 6-7. It says, this is an angel proclaiming, he says, fear God and give him glory.

Fear God and give him glory. And that's what I hope that my prayer is for us is we would be a church that would fear the Lord and we would give him glory alone.

[19:04] And I was thinking about this and thinking, you know, the one person who could just receive all the glory for himself would be Jesus Christ, you would think. And yet in scripture we read this in this famous song or poem in Philippians, the latter part of that poem where Paul is saying, have this mind among yourselves, that which is in Christ Jesus.

Who was in the very form of God did not consider equality with God as a thing to be grasped. But he emptied himself, taking on the form of a servant, being born the likeness of men and being found in human form.

He humbled himself by being obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross. And then it says, what it was the father's response to the son's act of obedience.

It says, then the father, then God highly exalted him, bestowing upon him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

So then the father elevates the son and says, I want all people to worship him. And then what does the son do with that glory that he received?

[20:16] And then the last part of that verse is this, to the glory of the father. This then takes all that recognition, all that praise, all that worship, and he says, Oh, but it's for the father's glory.

May we fear God and give him glory. And there is this intense deflection of glory by Paul and Barnabas.

I like the song, This is Amazing Grace by Phil Wickham, where he says, worthy is the lamb that was slain, worthy is the king who conquered the grave, worthy is the lamb that was slaved, worthy, worthy, worthy.

May all glory be to God. Thirdly, being a faithful gospel witness requires prudence in proclaiming the gospel of Christ.

There's something different about Lystra. There's something different about this town, that other towns that we've come into contact first. First, there's the difference is location, meaning this is a small town.

[21 : 35] There's a tiny Jewish community. There's not enough to sustain a synagogue. And it is the pattern of Paul to go to the synagogue.

The location of Lystra, there's no mention of a synagogue. It is likely one does not exist. So they're in the midst of the crowd without Christ. So the location of them proclaiming Christ isn't with the people who already are somewhat familiar with the law of God.

These are people who do not know the Lord. And so there's a different location of their proclamation of God's word. They're in the community. They're in the community, not in the synagogue.

So this helps us understand because the other thing that's different about this is the beginning point of the message. If you notice, when you hear the previous messages of Paul and Barnabas as they go to a synagogue, they have some common starting points.

And there's some common talking points leading to Christ as they proclaim the gospel. They will say, our Father Abraham, they'll go a little further and say, Moses.

[22 : 45] They may even reference David, Abraham, Moses, David, Abraham, Moses, David. And notice in this message, there is no Moses.

There is no Abraham. There is no David because these individuals, there's a tiny Jewish community. These don't have a reference of the law of God.

That's not a good starting point. So where do they begin? Their starting point of the message, they say, hey, in verse 15, we are of the same nature.

And to bring you good news, so how do they explain this good news? That you should turn from these vain things to living God.

Literally they just insulted their gods because they just called them vain, but you could translate that word literally and just say they're worthless. These Hermes, these Zeus, this temple that you have, these are worthless things.

[23 : 43] I'm here to proclaim the good news about the living God. Their main message is about the nature and the work of this living God.

And so how do they communicate it? They begin with creation, this living God. How? Who made of the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that is in them?

They don't start with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They don't start with Moses. They don't start with David. They go back to creation. They have no reference of these individuals.

They're without the law of God. All they can see, they go, so Paul goes back to creation. Let me go here. Let me have this as my starting point.

Let me tell you about the living God of all that you see who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.

[24 : 44] And then he talks about common grace. In past generations, he allowed the nations to walk in their own ways. So this is how this gracious God is.

He allowed former generations to walk in their ways, but he did not leave them or he did not leave himself without a witness. For he did good by giving you reigns from the heavens and the fruit and full seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.

So let me tell you about this living God, they say. It starts with creation, the God who created all things.

And he showered his benevolent grace through giving you reigns, through giving you fruit from the ground, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.

When at my previous church, we would minister in nations where the gospel, there was no church background at all.

[25 : 49] One of the locations was in Communist China. And so the missionaries there would do this with the individuals. And please listen, as America gets further and further away from the any knowledge of God, you may have to have a different starting point than Abraham, Moses, David.

You may have to go back to creation. So what these missionaries would do is they would ask the individuals who wanted to know about the Lord and want to learn, they would say, read the first 11 chapters of the book of Genesis, which is creation in the beginning.

God created the heavens, the earth all the way up through the tower of Babel. Why? Because you do that because it leaves a person longing. Here's how. And they would, they would be challenged by, is this true?

There's this folklore? What is this? Because you realize that God created humanity, humanity perfectly.

Then man sinned. And the wickedness of mankind was so rampant that God flooded the earth. And then after that, you would have thought they learned a lesson, but no, they started to build this idolatrous tower of Babel.

[27 : 05] And God confused the languages and sent mankind scattered all throughout the earth. You're left longing thinking, well, how do we live without sin?

How can we not have this a part of our lives? And it sets somebody up. Then they walk through the gospel of Mark to walk with a person to say, this is how Jesus took this sin of humanity and how one can be free from sin.

And then they would walk through the gospel of Mark. I'm giving you a practical example, but that kind of thing is exactly what Paul and Barnabas are communicating in this sermon.

And I would even say it this way. God's general revelation, his grace, seen in creation is the longest sermon ever preached.

Look what the language says. Yet God did not leave himself without witness in verse 17. What is this witness?

[28 : 10] For he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruit in season, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.

This God showers common grace. We read in Psalm 145.9, we read this, that the Lord is good to all and His mercy is over all that He has made.

Second, His mercy is over all that He has made. Second, in Matthew 545, for He makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good.

He sends rain on the just and the unjust. This common grace, this that God has done, that He showers on all of humanity, stands as a testimony.

It is the longest sermon that keeps preaching. God's witness and through His common grace, that He bestows on all humanity.

[29 : 18] Paul is making a stark contrast between Zeus and Hermes. Paul is helping them see the goodness of God in everyday life.

Are you aware of the goodness of God in your daily life? And every time you eat a meal, you relax in a chair, you laugh with a friend, you listen to the ocean, you watch a sun rise, you breathe fresh air, you are experiencing God's common grace.

Think about this. You know and you have experienced some long sermons at fourth, but you have not even touched the longest sermon ever preached of God's common grace.

Not all of humanity, God stands not without a witness and it speaks.

So if you are looking for a good entry point into a conversation with someone without Christ, you can begin by testifying to God's goodness, witness and creation.

[30 : 27] Did one breathe air today? Did you enjoy the rain? I mentioned to my wife this last week, it was the first time I had heard a thunderstorm this year.

And I was just like, I love that. I even opened the window in my house. I was like, I want to hear this. Did you see a sunset?

Did you eat food because of God's goodness, bringing it into fruition? You can testify to God's common grace.

Sometimes these are some common grace type observations I will talk about when I'm entering into a conversation with someone without the Lord.

Here are some questions or observations I will mention to somebody and I will ask them, why do you think this is? Why do you think it is that there is a hunger for love in this world?

[31 : 23] Why do children warm up to those who love them? Why? Why is there a hunger in this world for community?

Starbucks capitalized on this. Why do people like to go to Starbucks? Because you can sit down over a cup of coffee and visit with a friend.

Why do people long, lost or saved for community? Why do we have that? Why is there a search for freedom? Why is there a need to get rid of guilt and shame that exists in all of humanity?

Why is there a quest for meaning? Why is there a longing for significance? Why is there a thirst for satisfaction and joy? Why is there an attraction to beauty and creation?

We find something beautiful in creation and we make it a national park. In other countries that don't have national parks, you put a temple there to something.

[32 : 29] But why are all these beautiful places marked by some monument or something to protect it or to admire it? Why is there this natural attraction to beauty?

Why do we propose to get married in a beautiful location? Now I may have been proposed at Sherry's restaurant, but you can do better than that.

That's true by the way. These may be entry places for someone who is irreligious to help them see of God's common grace.

John Stott says this though, wherever you begin in the conversation, always end with Jesus Christ. So we come to our fourth reason, fourth aspect of being a faithful gospel witness that requires perseverance and suffering.

They could hardly, their sermon was interrupted because look what happens in the next verse in 19 and 20.

[33 : 41] But the Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out in the city, supposing him to be dead.

But when the disciples gathered about him, he arose up and he entered the city and on the next day he went with Barnabas to Derby.

In order to be a faithful gospel witness, it requires perseverance and suffering. Can you imagine the hatred? Can you imagine the hatred? The folks from Iconium that are mentioned, they had to travel 20 miles to get to Lystra.

Those from Antioch traveled 100 miles to get to Lystra, to get to Paul and Barnabas, to stop them from proclaiming the gospel. They traveled many days just to throw stones, just to kill them, just to stop what they perceived to be a false word.

Amazingly though some in Lystra had already believed because it says, but when the disciples gathered about him, it's too late.

[34 : 50] The gospel has already permeated the town of Lystra. The seed of the gospel had already been sown and it was already liberated some.

We know probably, perhaps, I should say, perhaps Timothy was one of them in the audience, in the crowd who had believed.

I wonder if Paul reflected back on the stoning of Stephen when he was stoned and Stephen's prayer that he uttered when he was killed.

Stephen's prayer when Paul stood witness with everyone's cloaks at his feet who had thrown stones, Paul stood witness to the stoning of Stephen.

Perhaps these words of Stephen, as stones were thrown at him, said, here's Stephen's prayer in Acts 56, Lord, do not hold this sin against them.

[35 : 46] I wonder also if young Timothy witnessed Paul's stoning. I wonder if this is the event that Paul had in mind when in 2 Corinthians, along with mentioning three times that he had been beaten with rods, three times he had been shipped wrecked, he had been without sleep, he had spent a night and a day in the ocean, he had faced all kinds of dangers and all kinds of toil and hardships for the gospel's sakes, and then he says this, and once I was stoned, and once I was stoned.

I wonder also, this is the region of Galatia in Asia Minor. I wonder if he had that stoning and the other things that happened to him when he wrote in Galatians 6:17, he says, I bear in my body the marks of Jesus.

I wonder what disfigurements, what scars resulted as the consequence of this stoning, regardless he thought of them as marks of Jesus, rejoicing in his sufferings.

Very Christian who wishes to follow Christ faithfully desires to see people come to the Savior will have to bear some measure of suffering. My prayer is that God would give us an abalance and enablement to persevere.

Lastly, we see this, being a faithful gospel witness requires a zealous love for the church. Let me read from verse 21 through the end of the chapter and we will conclude.

[37 : 19] When they had preached the gospel to the city of Derby and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and Iconium and 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. They passed through Pisidia and Pamphylia and when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Atalaya and from there they had sailed to Antioch where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had been fulfilled.

And when they had arrived, the church had gathered together, they declared all that God had done with them for how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles and there remained no little time with the disciples.

Being a faithful gospel witness requires a zealous love for the local church. I want to throw up this map for one moment. I want you to recall with me, we refer to Saul as Saul of Tarsus, because Tarsus is a little town there on the right hand side of the map, a little town and there's a Roman road, the white on the lines or a built constructed road built by the Romans that goes from Ephesus all the way down to Tarsus down to Antioch.

Paul is Saul of Tarsus, Paul of Tarsus. He's from Tarsus, he knows Tarsus. Look how far over they are in Derby. Now if you ask me if you want to go to Antioch, you know going through your old hometown to Tarsus is not a bad idea and you could spare yourself from having to go through towns like Iconia where you were, the death threat was on your life to, you can spare yourself from having to go back to Lystra where you were stoned.

[39 : 17] You can spare yourself from having to go to Antioch, those guys who traveled a hundred miles just to stone you. You can spare yourself of all of that. Why not just go down to Tarsus?

Because Paul and Barnabas have a zealous love for the church. I dislike with intense dislike the sentiment that is commonplace today that says this, I love Jesus but I hate the church.

Now I know that it is a very nuanced sentiment. There is church structure and church polity that is being expressed a disfavor for. There is also church hurts and wounds that are also expressed in that.

I have read some books, I have read the articles expressing this sentiment. There is unforgiveness perhaps involved in that sentiment.

All I want to say is this. If someone said to me, I love you Scott but I hate your wife, I would find it hard to maintain a relationship with you because my wife is provided to me by God and he led us to minister together through our lives and to make much of Christ together through this relationship.

[40 : 41] And to hate her is to hate someone I deeply love and cherish. Think with me all the more of Christ. How much more does Jesus love his bride the church?

He died for his bride the church. He chose her. He died for her. He lives to make intercession for her. He washes her with the water of the word. Jesus loves his bride the church.

So with all one voice we should say I love Jesus and I love the church. Why else would Paul go that way when Antioch is just as easily this way and that's close to his hometown?

He knows that territory. That's very familiar to him. Look with me in verse 22 we get a sense of why. In verse 21 they say they return to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. Why? What were they doing?

Motivation. Strengthening the souls of the disciples.

[41 : 49] Strengthening the souls of the disciples. Wolves might come in and teach false doctrine like in Antioch. They poisoned the minds of those in Antioch already. So let's go.

Let's strengthen the souls of those who know the Lord, who have turned to Christ, who are part of the church. And what else did they do? They encouraged them to continue in the faith saying that through tribulation we must enter the kingdom of God.

Why? If they hated Jesus and they hated Paul and they hated Barnabas and they wanted to stone them, surely they and they hate the message of Jesus Christ, surely they're going to hate these believers.

And so let's go and encourage them and say it's through this persecution. One must enter the kingdom. Be faithful church. And then look with me in verse 23 and they appointed elders.

They appointed elders in every church for them in every church. Who were these men that had quickly become elder qualified and had the characteristic of Christ and who were growing in their knowledge of God's word quickly that they could say, we need to put them.

[43 : 00] Why? What was the function of an elder? To be an example to the flock, to lead the flock, to protect the flock from false teaching, to teach sound doctrine.

Until they appointed elders and it's not merely an administrative exercise. Please catch this both today and back then. Appointing elders is not an administrative exercise.

You say, Scott, well, what is it? It's a spiritual exercise. Why? In verse 23, they appointed elders for them in every church in prayer and in fasting.

They committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. It was a spiritual exercise, not an administrative one.

And then they returned to Antioch. You find that this is the home church. This is the church that sent them out. And when they gathered together, the church gathered to hear a report.

[44 : 04] And even this is an expression of their zealous love for the church because they wanted to testify how God had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

And they wanted to encourage the church that had sent them. God saves through the person and work of Jesus Christ. And Gentiles have come to faith in Him.

And there is a zealous love for the local church. I love Jesus and I love the church. I pray that that sentiment would be true of all of us.

Application, do you have a zealous love for the church? Do you love God but hate is bright? Please ask the Lord to forgive you.

Ask the Lord to expose where you have a critical heart, a root of bitterness, a pocket of unforgivable forgiveness. Are you cynical about the church?

[45 : 07] The church of Jesus Christ is plan A through Z for the proclamation of the gospel.

For the lost coming to know Christ. It's plan A through Z. Ask the Lord to give you a love for His people. May we love and grow together.

Let us encourage each other with testimony of what God is doing. Do you find it easy to testify what God has done?

They went to Antioch, their home sending church, and they declared all that God had done. It should be easy on our lips to declare of what God is doing.

It's also a very fitting question to ask one another as we are dismissed. Ask one another, could you please just share with me what God is doing in your life?

[46 : 05] That would be an encouragement to all of us to ask each other that question. What is God doing? So being a faithful gospel witness requires perseverance in proclaiming the gospel and intense deflection of glory.

Perseverance in proclaiming the gospel of Christ. Your entry point may not be Abraham, Moses, and David. It may be creation, God's general revelation, but wherever you start it concludes with Jesus Christ.

It requires perseverance in suffering and it requires a zealous love for the church. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for this day.

Thank you for the love that you have for each of us, that you have displayed in your life, death, and resurrection for the forgiveness of sin.

You are to be praised. Lord, I pray as we sing this last song to you that we would declare loudly the truth that is contained in this song.

[47 : 17] You're wonderful, Lord. Thank you for your amazing grace and may we be faithful gospel witnesses. We love you, Lord. Amen.