

1PP Acts: To the End of the Earth

Part 38 Acts 14:21-28 Disciples over Decisions

10/16-17/2021

As we return to the Acts series, *To the End of the Earth*, let's recall our journey to this point. The Holy Spirit began to operate in God's people differently than before the Day of Pentecost. Jesus had prepared His disciples for what would happen on that day: **2PP** ***"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*** 1:8

He was, of course, right: **3PP** ***"When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance."***

2:1-4

We learned that 15 times the book of Acts mentions that believers were full of the Spirit, and each time they were given the power to testify and witness of Jesus Christ. Jesus commanded them and us to witness of Him to the end of the earth, giving us the Holy Spirit to provide the desire, and power to do so, exactly what the church began to do. The message of Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected for the salvation of sinners spread like wildfire in Jerusalem, then the areas of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Church, we have the same, unchanging mission today: to witness of Jesus to the end of the earth and many in our church are doing that to the glory of God!

It is exciting to see what the Holy Spirit is doing as you fearlessly share the good news of Jesus. So we return to **Acts 14:21**, recalling that the Apostles Paul and Barnabas were on a missionary trip, not to rebuild hurricane-devastated homes, something important we do of course. But this was a missionary journey into modern-day Turkey, then called Asia Minor, to share with anyone who could hear, the life-giving message of salvation in Jesus Christ. Everywhere they went through the region of Galatia, they told how Jesus could save them. And two things kept happening: people became believers, and opposition against them rose up. In the city of Lystra, Paul was stoned, left in a field thought to be dead, but somehow he lived. Today we pick up on what happened next and from it we learn several truths for us today.

4PP 1-Focus on Disciple-making

"When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch..." 21

Paul wasn't interested in piling up decisions for Christ, but in making disciples of Christ. Christian, this is our mission...**5PP** ***"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*** Matthew 28:19-20

The verb here is ***'make disciples'*** and the way we are to do this is Go, Win, Teach! We are all to get moving, share the gospel message of salvation, and teach new believers.

Notice how Luke describes that Paul and Barnabas did as they visited these churches they had started: *‘strengthening the souls of the disciples’*

Aren’t you curious what that even means... *‘strengthening the souls of the disciples’?*

The answer seems clear in what Luke wrote next:

6PP i. *‘encouraging them to continue in the faith’* 22

Our missionary duo did not teach these young believers that *once saved always saved*. Instead, their teaching carefully communicated the need for every believer to continue in the faith, what Jesus said in **7PP Mark 13:13**, *‘The one who endures to the end will be saved.’*

Believers of every level of maturity need to be reminded...stay firm in your faith, endure to the end of your life, and if you do, then your faith will be proved genuine

But if you walk away from Christ, you show that you never truly belonged to Him to begin with. The Holy Spirit mightily preserves genuine faith, and one way He does is through one another. We encourage each others’ faith, which is why we want to ask you to be part of a Growth Group. Listen to how the writer of Hebrews puts it: **8PP** *“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you*

an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” Hebrews 3:12-14

One of the common reasons a professing church attender falls away is because of hardship. Paul and Barnabas warned these young disciples: **9PP ii.** *‘through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God’* 22

I have found it to be so necessary to help new Christians develop the right perspective on trials. Both God and the devil have a purpose for the trials and tribulations that come into our lives. Our Heavenly Father wants the trial to bring us to the realization of our own inadequacy, and cause us to cling to His righteous right hand like a terrified child clings to parents.

The devil wants that trial to shake our confidence in God, that He can’t be fully trusted. Christian, this is why the bible spends such an enormous amount of time reiterating that God is sovereign, good, faithful, loving, merciful, perfect, and trustworthy.

10PP *“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you.”*

1 Peter 5:6

Part of disciple-making is ensuring that new believers are grounded in their faith, and have a community of believers around them to help continue in that faith, despite trials.

11PP 2-Focus on establishing Elders

“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.”

A moment ago I told you that the NT model was seen in producing disciples, not decisions. Now we see that the NT model was multiplying churches and Elders.

Did you know that there is not one single instance of a NT church having a single Elder?

There is always a plurality, a team of Elders, and we see Paul and Barnabas appointing them and committing them to the church with prayer and fasting.

God desires an organized, protected church led by godly men called Elders, but what are they? In the Bible, the word **12PP Elder** was synonymous with the words *overseer*, *bishop*, and *pastor*, the last one meaning *shepherd*

Every elder is a pastor who shepherds the congregation, and we do so as a team endowed with equal authority though not always equal influence

And later in Acts, we will discover what these elders are to do: **13PP** *“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears.”* Acts 20:28-31

The Elders at these churches were *‘committed to the Lord’*, set apart for a special task requiring special grace from God to fulfill so they would have courage and faithfulness

14PP 3-Focus on testifying of what God is doing

“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...”

26-27

Paul and Barnabas had been gone for about a year on this journey and when they returned, notice that the church gathered together to greet them and hear from them

This may seem insignificant, but remember that this church just a year before had commissioned Paul and Barnabas: *‘Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.’* Acts 13:3

They were personally invested in getting the gospel message beyond just the city of Antioch to the end of the earth

It didn’t require clever, or compelling church promotion to entice the believers to attend

They didn’t post on Facebook, *Come out and hear about Paul’s near-death experience!*

The church wanted to hear as Paul and Barnabas *“declared all that God had done with them, and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.”* 27

15PP *This church had a single-minded mission that was undivided by the interests of this world*
And they were not disappointed as they heard how unbelieving Gentiles were saved, and churches were established and Elders appointed, and lives were spared

The power of God had been on display and so Paul and Barnabas testified to it!

Doesn’t it move you to ponder, *Am I testifying to the church what God is doing in my life?*

Now I want everyone to listen closely to these words from the book of Revelation

16PP *“And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and*

Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, ‘Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.’ Revelation 12:9-11

Christian, do you truly realize the devil-conquering power you exercise when you testify and witness of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God?

When we love Jesus more than our own lives, our testimony of the Son of God Who shed His blood for our forgiveness and freedom from sin defeats the devil and his schemes

Friends, testify, witness this week of the Savior Whom you love!

“And they remained no little time with the disciples.” 28

This is not just a filler verse, for every word in the scriptures is crucial for spiritual life

If our witness is to be effective, it will proceed from the strength of Christian community

Being surrounded by godly men and women who love and strengthen you will foster lives lived powerfully for our God!

There are 59 ***‘one another’*** commands in the NT, and they are there for a reason

To help our faith endure, to embolden our gospel witness, to exhort our faithful service

We have seen in this passage that Paul and Barnabas focused on making disciples, establishing Elders and testifying of God’s great deeds

Pray