

14 At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed. ² But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the other Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. ³ So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders. ⁴ The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. ⁵ There was a plot afoot among both Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. ⁶ But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, ⁷ where they continued to preach the gospel. (Acts 14:1-7)



Last week we saw Paul and Barnabas in Antioch-Psidia. Last week we looked at Paul and Barnabas as they shared the gospel in Antioch. You will remember that they came into the city, and they made their way to the synagogue on that first Sabbath morning where after having heard the Torah portion for the day, Paul was invited to get up and give a word of encouragement to the group there. We learned that Paul and Barnabas were well received by the Gentiles who

worshipped there in the synagogue, but they were basically rejected by the Jews. By the end of the chapter, they were ejected from the city by those who had become jealous of how they had been well received.

We learned last week that we should not measure our success by the outcome or our efforts, but rather whether we are doing what God wants us to be doing. We saw that even though Paul and Barnabas may not have had great successes as the world measure success, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and they were filled with joy. That my friend is a great picture of success!

We then learned that joy is a choice. We can and should discipline ourselves to have joy in our lives if we will remember to do three things: 1) Scripture tells us to be thankful in everything. We are told to be grateful people. Learn to say thank you to God and learn to say “thank you” to others. 2) Secondly, we must learn to focus on positive uplifting things instead of dwelling on the negatives we encounter in people and in life’s circumstances. In that refocus, we can begin to discover joy. 3) Thirdly and lastly, we talked about gaining an inkling of divine perspective. That means we stop and remember that God’s ways are not our ways. God’s thoughts are not our thoughts. He sees the entirety of our lives while we are only in the moment. An understanding of divine perspective can help keep our hearts filled with joy.

Here again we see Paul and Barnabas attending the synagogue. That is what an obedient observant Jew does on the Sabbath, and likewise we as Christ-Followers are commanded

to gather together and encourage one another. The writer of Hebrews (who some scholars think was Barnabas) tells us, “²⁴ *And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,* ²⁵ *not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*” (Hebrews 10:24-25 NKJV)

Our scripture of the day tells us that “they spoke effectively”. Are you able to speak effectively about your faith? Are you able to speak in a way in which you are not ashamed of the gospel. Are you prepared to make a defense of what you believe? If not, I am available for you to practice and polish your presentation of exactly what Jesus has done in your life. Once again our scripture for today shows mixed results. Some who heard believed and others didn’t. It will be exactly the same as you share your faith with the world around you.

I want to also say that sharing your faith is not a thing where you’ll have to force or should force the gospel on those whom you meet. The disciple Peter tells us, “¹⁵ *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;* ¹⁶ *having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.* (1 Peter 3:15-16 NKJV). You do your part and leave the results up to God. “Study to show yourself approved 1 Timothy “A word spoken are like an apple.” “Speak the truth in love...” You may win the argument but the person may end up walking away in disbelief.

The text tells us that Paul and Barnabas then spent considerable time there. That means that they didn’t give up at the first sign of hardship. And guess what? Neither should we. It is in the midst of the hardship that you’ve got to keep on keeping on. Don’t give up. Never surrender. It was in the midst of the fire and the fight that they spoke boldly for the Lord. When you share your faith in Jesus, do so boldly! The passage then tells us that the city became divided between those who wanted to kill Paul and Barnabas and those that followed their teaching.

Guys this reminds us that sometimes the hardship gets really tough. I suppose when Paul felt their lives were in danger and when he knew the Holy Spirit had another direction for him to take, their mission in Iconium was finished. The text tells us that they then departed for Derbe and Lystra. And, we will see this pattern happen over and over again. Paul and Barnabas weren’t quitters. They understood perseverance. Lets talk about that for a minute.



What exactly is perseverance? Well “per” means “through” and “severe” means something bad or intense. So, what can we do to be people who keep on keeping on, even through hardship and difficulty? The Bible tells us a lot about persevering.

Perseverance is closely related to “not losing hope:”. It has a lot to do with rejoicing, being patient, and being constant. Let’s look at a few verses that tell us some

of the keys to living courageous lives that are hopeful, filled with patience, and constant. FYI, there is a term in scripture called “perseverance of the saints” having to do with whether we can or cannot lose our salvation. That is not what I am addressing this morning.

The perseverance I am talking about is the how-to of just keeping on with the Christian life. In other words, how to keep on keeping on in your walk with Jesus when the going gets rough. Now that I am a pastor some of my favorite scriptures come out of what we call the “pastoral epistles”. Those are Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus who were young pastors. Timothy was a pastor in Ephesus and Titus was a pastor in Crete and Dalmatia in what is now the country of Croatia.

In Paul’s encouraging letter to Timothy he tells him to “watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers”. That warning goes for all Christians. We are to persevere in godly living and believe the truth steadfastly. Translated into how-to language that tells us to:

- 1) **STAY IN THE WORD** – develop a time each day when you get alone with God. Study a specific piece of scripture and ask God to apply it to your life. (Study xxxxx)
- 2) **GODLY LIVING** - Persevere in godly living – understand that the ways of the world are contrary to the ways of the Spirit. Every distraction imaginable will try to interfere between you and God.
- 3) **IT’S A DAILY ENDEAVOR** -Realize that your walk with Jesus is a **DAILY** walk. It is like eating food or drinking water. It is something you do every day and sometimes all the day (if you’re fasting or in a spirit of prayer.)

We can then read continuing words about perseverance spoken by James, the brother of Jesus who was pastor in the first church in Jerusalem. He tells us, to be “*doers of the word and not hearers only*” because those who hear but do not do are “*deceiving themselves.*” “*But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it [perseveres]...this one will be blessed in what he does*”(James 1:22-24

- 4) PUT YOUR FAITH INTO ACTION – So fourthly, perseverance involves putting your faith into action. When you put your faith into action it does not save you, but it helps you to carry on and to be involved in God’s will for your life. When you know you are in His will it is empowering and will give you the strength to carry on. There is no thrill like that of being in tune and in step with the God who made you. WOW!
- 5) HARDSHIPS CREATE SPIRITUAL MUSCLES - That strength that we just talked about helps you to develop spiritual muscles. Your ability to withstand the hardships that will come your way gets stronger and stronger. You are promised God’s blessings in it all. James continues in telling us to be “doers of the word and not hearers only”. If we are just hearers of God’s Word and we never put it into action we “deceive ourselves” into thinking we’re somehow productive and purposeful in the Kingdom of God.
- 6) REWARDS OF PEACE OF MIND (SHALOM) – In the Psalms we are reminded that in keeping God’s commandments there is “great reward”. (Psalm 19:11) This reward is peace of mind, a clear conscience, and a true testimony and witness to the world around us that shouts volumes louder than our mere words.
- 7) CROWN OF LIFE – James continues to tell us that if we persevere “under trials” we will be blessed with the “crown of life” which God has promised to faithful believers. (James 1:12). What is that “crown of life”? It is being eternally secure in our salvation. That is the prize! To be with Him forever and ever!
- 8) GODLY LIVING BRINGS PERSECUTION – DON’T BE SURPRISED - If we desire and attempt to live godly lives in Christ, we *will* suffer persecution. (2 Timothy 3:12), but the faithful will persevere and will be empowered by the almighty power of God through the Holy Spirit who guarantees our salvation and who we are promised will keep us “strong to the end” so that we will be “blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus”. (1 Corinthians 1:8)

You see Paul living this out in the Book of Acts. So in Acts 13-20, we see 13 and 14 setting the scene for getting the gospel into the foreign world, and then Chapter 15 will be the whole church at that time asking if it okay to take the gospel to others without them becoming Jews. Chapters 16-20 are Luke’s summary of Paul’s main mission. We will follow Paul to Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, etc.

Each time Paul goes somewhere there are riots in those places followed by an explanation by Paul of what exactly the gospel is, who Jesus was, and what a Christian is and how a Christian should act. We are different, but we are not wicked and we are

making people's lives and communities better. Paul gives us a perfect example of what it means to persevere. Now you go and do likewise!

Let us Pray

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Fryday - Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.