

2024 Theme - Focus On What Matters

Sermon Series - The Book of Acts/God's Plan for His Church

Sermon Title - They did what?

Sermon Text - Acts 14:20-28

Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry

Introduction

"I will build my life, upon your love, It is a firm foundation
I will put my trust, in you alone And I will not be shaken"

That's the testimony of each of these who have made their decision to follow Christ and to make that public through the beautiful act of Baptism! And there may be some people in your life, when they find out that you've followed the Lord and painted the picture of your faith through believer's baptism, who may very well say: "They did what?" You see, sometimes the world just doesn't understand our commitment to Jesus Christ, but then they haven't experienced what we have in being loved, forgiven, and filled with new purpose and meaning through our faith in Jesus! They haven't experienced or realized the awesome cost and sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf to make a way for us to be made right with God, to have an eternal home in heaven, and to be filled with His presence, His power, His provision, His purpose and His peace in this world! Let's pray and we'll discover why Paul and Barnabas did the unthinkable when deciding on the route they would take on their missionary journey! Pray.

Today's message is filled with questions and I hope answers! Our text is found in the Book of Acts chapter 14:20-28. Let's read it together and you can read along in your Bible, on the screen, or in the Youversion Bible app. Let me refresh your mind about what happened in Lystra...

Acts 14:19 Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead.

Acts 14:20 But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

Acts 14:21 They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch,

Acts 14:22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.

Acts 14:23 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.

Acts 14:24 After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia,

Acts 14:25 and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.

Acts 14:26 From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.

Acts 14:27 On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

Acts 14:28 And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

After being persecuted, Paul and Barnabas preached in Derbe and then went back to the cities of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, all places where they had been severely persecuted.

Wait a minute! They did what? You heard me right! They went back to the cities of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, all the places where they had been severely persecuted!

They had been faithful to preach Jesus every place they went and then went back to the very places they had been mistreated. Sometimes God may lead us to do things that do not make sense in the world's eyes, but it makes perfect sense in God's kingdom. So the answer to our question, "They did what?" is really several answers. The first one is that...

1. They continued to preach the message of Christ wherever they went even though it had a history of getting them into trouble.

Acts 14:20 ... The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

Acts 14:21 They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples...

So right after Paul had been stoned for preaching the gospel, the good news of Jesus, he and Barnabas go to Derbe and continue to share the truth and the love of Jesus with everyone they meet! Why keep doing what had gotten them into trouble?

They knew it was true!

Paul stated this in the book of Romans quoting some Old Testament Scripture...

Rom 15:8 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs...

Rom 15:9 so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name."

Rom 15:10 Again, it says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people."

Rom 15:11 And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples."

Rom 15:12 And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him."

Why keep doing what had gotten them into trouble? They believed with every fiber of their being that...

Jesus is for everyone who will believe!

Paul stated this at the very beginning of the Book of Romans...

Rom 1:14 I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.

Rom 1:15 That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome.

Rom 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

Rom 1:17 For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Why keep doing what had gotten them into trouble?

They knew what God had done in their own lives!

When you've experienced personally the awesome, beautiful, and life changing work of Jesus in your life, it's almost impossible to keep it to yourself! You don't need to be obnoxious about it, but you can be excited and passionate about it, and when you have the chance, share it! Paul did! Given any chance to share his testimony and how he came to know Jesus Christ in a personal way Paul would take it regardless of the potential personal cost, possible rejection or persecution it might cause him. In fact, we have this fascinating account later in the Book of Acts where Paul shares his story with King Agrippa! Once again he had been arrested for his faith, but instead of begging to be released, he took the opportunity and shared the whole story of his conversion! He talked about how before he met Jesus, he had personally persecuted anyone who followed Jesus! He shared how he had seen a blinding light and Jesus had spoken to him in a vision on the road to Damascus! He told King Agrippa about that day...

Acts 26:15 "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' " 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied.

Acts 26:16 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me.

Acts 26:17 I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them

Acts 26:18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

Acts 26:19 "So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven.

Acts 26:20 First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.

Acts 26:21 That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me.

Acts 26:22 But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen--

Acts 26:23 that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles."

God had done amazing things in Paul's life and he knew it was because Jesus was who He said He was and that He had indeed suffered on the cross for the world's sins, Paul's, yours and mine! Paul and Barnabus both had a passion to share with others what God could do in their lives if they would allow Jesus to come into their hearts and lives! Paul couldn't judge those who

were persecuting him because he knew he had once been exactly where they were and he too had once rejected Jesus, but had experienced the amazing grace of our Lord in his life and he wanted others to know the same peace, freedom and love that he had found!

What about you? Would you continue to preach the message of Christ wherever you go even though it had a history of getting you into trouble! Are you convinced that the gospel is true? Do you believe that Jesus is for everyone who will believe? Do you have a testimony of what God has done in your own life that causes you to have a passion for others to know what you know and to find what you've found, and to experience what you've experienced in your personal walk with Jesus? If the gospel is going to spread throughout our world today, we need people who are as committed to the message as Paul and Barnabus were in the first century!

Just a few years after I had accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior, when I was a teenager, I drove up to the skating rink in Vicksburg, MS. As I was walking across the parking lot I handed another teenager a gospel pamphlet that said, Did You Know God Loves You? The guy tore it up and threw it down and said "I don't need your piece of paper or your God!" I wasn't mad at him, I was heartbroken for him. I went home later that night and wrote a song that says this...

"Hey all you brothers and hey all you sisters out there, I've have a message in my heart that I've just got to share, I'm not gonna cram it down your throat, I'm not gonna make you cough and choke, no I just wanna share because I care, because I care for you! So please help them see your light in the night so they can make it on home alright."

And this takes us to another answer to the question, "They did what?" The answer is...

2. They went back to the very cities that had persecuted them.

Acts 14:21 They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch,

Really? What were they thinking? Lystra was where Paul had been stoned and left for dead. In Iconium there had been a plot afoot among the Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. In Antioch they were persecuted and expelled from the region. Why go back to the places where they had been ridiculed, persecuted, stoned and run out of town? The answer is this...

Paul and Barnabas knew the importance of discipleship and that the new believers would need to be strengthened and encouraged!

Our text says...

Acts 14:21 ... Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch,

Acts 14:22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.

Paul and Barnabas knew the importance of encouragement within the family of God. They knew the ones who had believed their message in those cities needed to be disciplined and encouraged! They didn't want them to think they had abandoned them or were more concerned about their own safety! No, Paul and Barnabas put their own wants and needs behind the needs of those they had reached with the gospel. Those people who were now a part of God's family!

Rom 15:4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Rom 15:5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus,

Rom 15:6 so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And then at the end of verse 22 Paul says something very interesting and somewhat shocking...

Acts 14:22 ..."We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.

Whoa, what did they say?

"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,"

"Pastor Larry, I thought we were saved by grace through faith, not works. What does he mean that we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God?" Good question. Let me explain...

You are right, we are saved by grace, not by works. Paul said it plainly in Ephesians 2:8-9...

Ephesians 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—

Ephesians 2:9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

And verse ten is where the hardships come in. We were created in Christ Jesus to do good works that God has prepared for us to do in this world! Remember that God's kingdom is where God rules, and God doesn't just want to be the Savior of our souls, He wants to be the Lord of our lives as well so we can experience God's kingdom in our lives here on this earth! And of course Satan will do everything in his power to prevent us from achieving God's will for our lives here. Satan doesn't want us walking in God's kingdom rule and under God's authority! As I've said before, once Satan loses your soul to Jesus he knows he can't get it back, so he will do everything he can to destroy your life. Once you allow God to establish His Kingdom rule in your heart and life, the battle begins. Satan and the world will come against you with a vengeance.

But don't be dismayed, we can overcome the enemy! Paul wanted the new believers to understand this. He said...

Col 1:9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Col 1:10 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,

Col 1:11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully

Col 1:12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

Col 1:13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,

Col 1:14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Paul said,

Col 1:12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

A part of what you inherit when you come to Jesus is brothers and sisters in Christ who are also a part of the kingdom of light! Don't underestimate the strength that comes from being connected with other brothers and sisters in Christ! That's why at Northshore Church we value connection with one another. In fact we want every member of our church to...

Come to worship! Connect to a small group!
Commit to grow! Collaborate to achieve the mission!

And so once again we ask this question: Why would Paul and Barnabas go back to the places where they had been ridiculed, persecuted, stoned and left for dead? The answer is that...

They knew the desperate need others had for Christ and Paul would not give up even on those who had mistreated them and rejected Jesus!

Paul was actually following Jesus' example and His teaching that said...

Luke 6:27 "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,

Luke 6:28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

Can this really change anyone? Well, let me give you another personal example from my young Christian life! I had a dear friend and mentor, Bro. Gary Hodges, who went to be with our Lord during Covid! He was my youth pastor who took us on a mission trip to Tamaqua, Pennsylvania

to help start a church. The girls stayed in homes with church members and us guys slept on sleeping bags in the basement of a church in the neighboring valley of Cunningham. One night I asked Bro. Gary if I could walk outside and sit on the steps of the church for a little while. He said, yes, just don't go anywhere else because there's a curfew in this town. I was having a hard time sleeping, I was just so excited about the opportunity to share Jesus in that community. As I was sitting on the steps meditating I heard something from around a dark curve in the road. It was three teenagers, two girls and a boy, walking down the road. I wasn't really thinking, and I was so excited, I jumped up and said, "Hey guys! Can I talk to you for a minute?" Now that church had a cemetery, and I think I about scared the life out of them. Or it might have been that they were out after curfew and they thought they had been busted! Anyway, I started talking to them about Jesus and how much He loved them and could change their lives forever, and the guy started making fun of me, they laughed and walked off. I was heartbroken and thought over and over again about how I could have handled that so much better than I did. But the story doesn't end there. You see, we stayed in Cunningham at night but would go to Tamaqua every day to do Vacation Bible School in the 5 small city parks and then we would do a youth concert at night before we went back to Cunningham to sleep. But the day after the night I had approached the teenagers Bro. Gary said that we were going to stay in Cunningham so everyone could rest and that we would go to the local laundromat and wash clothes! Once we got our clothes started, most of the youth were hanging out in the laundromat. I walked outside and sat down on the sidewalk and started reading my little Gideon New Testament. As it turns out there was an ice cream store and youth hangout just around the corner, that we didn't know anything about. I heard some noise and looked up and saw about 15 teenagers walking towards me on the sidewalk. And then I recognized the guy from the night before and the girls. I was like, how can I crawl under the concrete and hide! Then the guy walked up with the group in tow, and said, "this is the dude we were telling you about! Hey man, why don't you tell my friends what you were telling us! Hey guys get a load of this!" I think I apologized for scaring them the night before. And then I began sharing my testimony with them of the night I told my Dad the God thing was not for me and how I later walked to church and heard a message called "The Brutality of the Cross!" As I began describing to them what I heard that night, about the suffering of Jesus, they began sitting down and listening intently, all except the one guy! Several of them began wiping tears from their eyes. I told them that Jesus would come into their lives and forgive them of their sins, if they would just admit they needed a Savior, believe Jesus died to be that Savior and call on His Name to be saved. I asked them how many would like to do that and all but about two raised their hands! I poked my head in the laundromat and yelled out, "Hey guys, I need some counselors out here!" And they said, "What, are you kidding?" I said "No, help me please!" It was a beautiful thing to see teenagers praying with teenagers to accept Jesus as their Savior! It was a time of celebration. Once the prayer was over, those kids invited our youth to walk to the ice cream shop to hang out! On the way, the guy who had made fun of me began to make fun of one of his friends for praying with us. That friend looked at his skeptical friend, and said: "Listen, that's the best decision I've ever made, you should have prayed the prayer too!"

Don't ever give up, even if sometimes your attempts to share the gospel seem like a disaster. God will bless you if you are sincere and share in love! And you'll learn from your mistakes and

get better at it, but don't think God can't use even your mess ups and make good come from them! He certainly did that for me in Pennsylvania! But once again we ask the question, "They did what?"

3. They appointed others to become leaders in sharing the same message.

Acts 14:23 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.

Why get others involved in what you know may also cause them trouble?

Paul and Barnabas knew they could not be everywhere, do everything, or reach everyone.

We must partner together with other brothers and sisters if we are going to transform our world! Paul said this...

Phil 1:3 I thank my God every time I remember you.

Phil 1:4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy

Phil 1:5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,

Phil 1:6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

And listen to this beautiful truth found in that last verse, let me read it again...

Phil 1:6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Jesus is the One who begins the good work in you! Jesus is the one who will carry you through all of the difficulties you will encounter as you follow Him and do the good works of His kingdom, and Jesus will help you complete the work He's called you to do! With that in mind, let me ask you this question...

What should we be doing in our church and in our personal lives to encourage, strengthen and lead others to share the message of Christ? It has to do with coming up with ways we can fulfill our purpose, achieve our mission, and accomplish our vision.

Our purpose is to see the One who gave His life for us exalted and the ones He gave His life for transformed!

Our mission is to transform worship, people and the world!

Our vision is to raise up a healthy church that will impact the north shore and ultimately the world with the life changing message of Jesus Christ!

And the last answer to our question, “They did what?”

4. Paul and Barnabas went back to the place where they had been committed to the work and shared the wonderful things that God had done through them.

Acts 14:26 From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.

Acts 14:27 On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

Acts 14:28 And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

After appointing others Paul and Barnabas continued their mission by spending time making disciples! Training others is not so you won't have to do ministry anymore! As I've said, "I'll never retire from telling folks about Jesus or doing ministry, but there's a time to pass the baton in leadership!" Paul and Barnaba knew the importance of raising up future leaders. Paul would later tell his young apprentice Timothy...

2 Tim 2:2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

It is my prayer that our church will continue to be faithful to entrust the message of Jesus to people by making disciples who will in turn make disciples! I pray that we will be so faithful to share the good news of Jesus no matter the hardships, the ridicule or even persecution, that when the world says, “They did what?” we can answer: “we were just being faithful to the calling God placed on our lives to share His love with the world and with you!

Let's pray!