

DERBE AND THE RETURN JOURNEY: HOW CHURCHES ARE MADE STRONG

ACTS 14:21–28

Introduction

There are two great ministries in the church — that of preaching the gospel and making disciples, and that of strengthening the church. There is terrible neglect in both evangelism and strengthening the church. Just how are churches made strong? This is the lesson of this passage. However, believers must undertake and give themselves to both tasks.

- I. Task 1: preach the good news, the gospel and make disciples (v. 21).
- II. Task 2: be committed to strengthening the church (vv. 21-27).
- III. Conclusion: reviving one's own spirit (v. 28).

I. Acts 14:21 Preaching and Making Disciples

The first great task was to preach the good news and make disciples. Note two challenging facts.

1. The ministry of the preachers (Paul and Barnabas) was to *preach* the good news (euaggelisamenoi). And that is exactly what they did.

Acts 13:5 When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.

Acts 13:16 Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: “Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me!”

Acts 13:32 “We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers.”

Acts 13:38-39 Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.

Acts 13:43-44, 49 When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God. On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.

Acts 14:1 At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.

Acts 14:3 So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.

Acts 14:6-7 *But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, where they continued to preach the good news.*

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.*

2. The ministry of the preachers (Paul and Barnabas) was to make disciples. The words *won a large number of disciples* (matheteusantes hikanous) mean *had made many disciples*. They not only preached, they had taken the believers and made disciples out of them (see note, *Discipleship*, Acts 13:5-6).

Mat 28:19-20 *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

Eph 4:11-12 *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.*

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.*

ACTS 14: 21 DERBE

The city was the furthestmost frontier city of the Roman empire in Galatia. It was about thirty miles from Lystra and lay on the major road running back through the country into Lystra. The Derbe church...

- was founded by Paul on his first missionary journey (Acts.14:20-21).
- was visited by Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:1) and probably on his third (Acts 18:23).

Gaius, who travelled with Paul to Jerusalem, was a leader in the church at Derbe (Acts 20:4). □

II. **Acts 14:21–27** *Minister’s Duty: Strengthen the Church*

The second great task was to strengthen the churches. A real commitment was needed to accomplish this task. The reasons are clear.

First, the excitement of a new work, that is, of large numbers of receptive people and conversions was over. The remaining people in a community are just not as receptive as the first persons who made decisions. And the longer a church waits to reach out, the more difficult it is to reach people with the gospel. The work of day-by-day ministry *in the same community* and preaching to and teaching the *same people* are just not as exciting as reaching out into new areas and establishing new works.

Second, strengthening and making true disciples of believers are much more difficult than leading them to Christ. Leading people to Christ involves a one-time decision, but strengthening and making disciples involves...

- many decisions
- many days and months and sometimes years
- the same people over and over
- different levels of spiritual growth
- different levels of commitment
- varied personalities
- different emotions
- different ages
- opposing thoughts and ideas

Note Paul's commitment. In Derbe he was only 160 miles from his hometown, Tarsus. When he left Derbe, he could have continued on toward Tarsus by travelling over the mountain pass or the Cilician Gates. Remember: when he had first begun to preach, he had ministered in his hometown and throughout Syria for about eleven years. The pull to visit his home and the churches he had established there must have been strong. But the *need* lay with the churches he had more recently founded, and Paul belonged to the Lord. Therefore, he had to return to the churches just established and strengthen them. His return trip gives a clear picture of what is involved in strengthening churches.

1. There was *strengthening* (*episterizantes*) which means confirming, making firm, establishing. New converts and churches always stand in danger of...
 - wavering
 - being lured away
 - returning to religious tradition
 - slipping back
 - not praying faithfully
 - being tempted by worldly friends
 - not studying the Scripture consistently
 - not witnessing
2. There was encouragement (see *Preaching*, pt. 3, Acts 11:19-30; *The Faith*, Acts 14:22).
3. There was warning about persecution. The true believer passes through many trials and afflictions while entering into the Kingdom of God. (See notes, Lk. 21:12-19.)
 - a. The believer will suffer persecution. He must be warned unless he becomes discouraged and fall away when persecution strikes.

John 15:20 “Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.”

John 16:1-4 “All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this at first because I was with you.”

Phil 1:29 *For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him.*

1 Th 3:3 *So that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them.*

1 John 3:13 *Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you.*

1 Pet 4:12-13 *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.*

- b. The believer is given the most glorious assurance: he shall *pass through* the tribulation or trial. The tribulation will end. The believer will not be swallowed up by the persecution and cast into eternity lost and perishing. If the trial does not end on earth, God will take the believer on to heaven to live in His glorious presence forever.

2 Tim 4:17-18 *But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. The LORD will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

Heb 13:6 *So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"*

Exo 33:14 *The Lord replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."*

Isa 43:1-2 *But now, this is what the LORD says — he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.*

4. There was the organizing of the church (see *Appointment; Ordination*, Acts 14:23; also see *Elder*, Tit 1:5-9).
5. There was visiting all about and preaching the Word (vv. 24-25). No doubt believers had been reached throughout the whole district of Galatia. The first believers were bearing testimony with the travelling public as well as with their neighbours. The point to note is this: Paul and Barnabas were *busy*, as busy as they could be moving about and preaching the Word. They were just as busy in following up and strengthening the churches as they had been in establishing them.

Mark 16:15 *He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."*

Luke 4:18-19 *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."*

1 Cor 2:2-5 *For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.*

1 Cor 9:16 *Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*

2 Cor 4:5 *For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.*

2 Tim 4:2 *Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction.*

6. There was an acknowledging and reporting to the mother church (vv. 26-27). Note what was done when Paul and Barnabas returned to the mother church of Antioch.
 - a. The church was called together for the most glorious missionary meeting imaginable, the very first missionary report ever given to a mother church.
 - b. The two missionaries reported *all that God had done* through them.

Thought 1. This is a crucial point: ministers, preachers and missionaries — all are to be mere instruments in the hand of God. (See note, pts. 2, 3, Acts 14:3.)

John 15:16 *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.”*

Acts 9:15 *But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.”*

- c. The door of faith was now opened to the Gentiles, that is, to the whole world.

Thought 1. This meant three very significant things.

- 1) The door of faith, faith in Christ, was being proclaimed as the presence of God (Jn. 14:6; 1 Tim 2:5).
- 2) God was the One who had opened the door. He was the One who had quickened the gospel to their hearts and minds. No man could do that; only God could.
- 3) It was proven that every person can be saved, no matter who they are. And they can be saved by *faith*...
 - apart from law
 - apart from novel ideas
 - apart from philosophy
 - apart from ritual (circumcision)
 - apart from worldly speculations and myths
 - apart from humanistic imagination

Rom 10:13 For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

1 Tim 2:4-5 Who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

Titus 2:11-12 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.

2 Pet 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

ACTS 14:22 THE FAITH

The term “remain true to the faith” probably means more than just *believing* in Jesus. Paul was probably referring to the *belief* and doctrines of the Christian faith. We must remember that Paul most likely wrote out the basic beliefs for the churches he established. It is difficult to imagine him not leaving them with the written will of God. If pen and parchment were available, as they often were, he certainly would not have left such an important matter as the basic beliefs of Christianity dependent upon the frail memory of human minds. There is little question that he wrote out the doctrines for the Colosse church (Col. 1:23) and that he refers to a creed or a set of doctrines when writing to Timothy (1 Tim. 5:8). The term “the faith,” that is, teaching the basic beliefs and doctrines of God’s Word (Scripture), tells the minister his task: the minister is to encourage the church, encourage the believers, to continue, persevere and be steadfast in the faith, in the basic beliefs of the faith.

1 Cor 15:58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.

Gal 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. □

ACTS 14:23 APPOINTMENT; ORDINATION (CHEIROTONEO)

To appoint, to ordain, to elect, to choose by stretching out the hand. The word is used to refer to both God and men’s choosing others. Two examples are:

=> “witnesses whom God had already *chosen*” (Acts 10:41).

=> “the brother... [who] was *chosen* by the churches to accompany” (2 Cor 8:18-19).

Now note that the seven deacons were first elected by the church and then appointed by the apostles (Acts 6:3-6). The apostles appointed or laid hands upon them.

The same plan was most likely followed by Paul and Barnabas in appointing elders. (See Tit. 1:5.) However, it should always be remembered that the elder or minister was first *chosen by the Holy Spirit* (Acts 20:28; 13:2).

Note that appointing elders or ministers involves three very significant steps.

1. Appointment involves the appointment itself. As just discussed, this involves being ordained or chosen by the Spirit of God, the church and other ministers.
2. Appointment involves prayer and fasting. Choosing and being chosen to be an elder or minister is a serious matter — so serious that prayer needs to be accompanied by fasting. Everything needs to be set aside so that the appointment of the minister may be concentrated upon. God's *choice* must be known, and only His choice must be ordained. The ministry must be protected and safeguarded from false teachers. (See note, *Fasting*, Mt. 6:16-18.)
3. Appointment involves commending the minister to the Lord. The word means to entrust, to deposit, to commit into the Lord's keeping. The elder believes in the Lord Jesus, the sovereign Majesty of the universe. Therefore, if the church and other ministers have prayed and fasted and been led by the Lord in appointing the minister, they can entrust the new minister into the keeping of the Lord's care. And they can be assured that the Lord will keep the new minister.

Luke 10:19 *"I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you."*

Rom 14:4 *Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.*

2 Cor 3:6 *He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant — not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*

2 Cor 9:8 *And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*

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.*

Phil 4:13 *I can do everything through him who gives me strength.*

1 Tim 1:12 *I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.*

Jude 1:24-25 *To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy — to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. □*

ACTS 14:25 ATTALIA

A seaport of the province of Pamphylia. Paul closed out his first missionary journey and sailed back home to Antioch from the city. □

III. Acts 14:28 Minister's Faithfulness

Paul and Barnabas spent a long time in Antioch reviving their spirits, and no doubt they were also ministering to the believers.

John 21:16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

Gal 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. ■