

How To Be A Faithful Witness/Follower – Acts 14

Welcome. I trust you had a good Independence Day celebration, remembering the blessing of God to *form* our nation, and his continued grace to *sustain* it. Including the various *freedoms* we enjoy. Like the freedom of religion. And the freedom to assemble. The basis on which *we* assemble.

➤ So let's continue to worship by turning to Acts 14.

We're following Paul on his first missionary journey, and left off last week on his way to Iconium. (**Map**, ESV Study Bible, 2110)

It started in Antioch, then Cyprus, then to Perga and Antioch in Pisidia.

Now, it's on to Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. And then back again. All in chapter 14.

And woven into it are 4 principles for how to be a faithful *witness*, and 4 for how to be a faithful *follower*. A *witness* for Christ, and a *follower* of Christ.

Something we should *all* want. Both/and. May God give us the desire.

➤ So let's dig in and see what God has for us. Act 14, starting with v1-7. (**Outline**)

[1] *Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed.*

They *spoke in such a way* doesn't refer to their oratory skills, but their Spirit-filled passion. Because later on, in his letter to the Corinthians . . .

Paul said that his *speech and message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power* (1 Cor 2:4). He spoke God's way.

And a great number *believed*. Jews and Greeks.

[2] *But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers* [planted seeds of doubt and distrust]. [3] *So they remained for a long time* [that's unexpected], *speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace* [the Gospel], *granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands* [God authenticated their message with miracles]. [4] *But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles* [referring to Paul and Barnabas; probably using the term in a generic sense, as "one who is sent," some were for them, others against].

[5] *When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them,* [6] *they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country,* [7] *and there they continued to preach the gospel.*

To be a faithful . . .

Witness: Don't be deterred by opposition (v1-7)

We've seen it before and we'll see it again. And I think it's *particularly* appropriate for our day and age. When opposition to what we believe and how we live is *increasing*. Don't be deterred.

Sometimes that means *staying put* and standing firm – like they did at Iconium. V3.

With the Gentiles stirred up and poisoned against them, *they remained for a long time*. That's not what we expect as we read. We *expect* it to say, "they loaded up the truck and got out of town."

But it doesn't. They stayed *put* in the face of opposition. They stood firm.

Other times, not being deterred means *moving on* – like they did at Lystra and Derbe. V5.

When an attempt was made . . . to stone them, they learned of it and fled.

But it wasn't home they fled to. It was another *city*. They moved on.

Sometimes not being deterred means staying alive to minister somewhere else.

And third, it always means *speaking boldly*.

V3 says *they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord*.

And v7, at Lystra and Derbe, *they continued to preach the gospel*.

➤ Don't let those who *oppose* you, or oppose the *Gospel*, or oppose *us*, keep you from speaking boldly. Whether in the classroom, your living room, or a boardroom.

Don't be deterred. Don't be intimidated. Don't be silenced.

Even if it means your job is at risk; or your grade docked; or your spot on the team lost.

Like it was for Jaelene Hinkle.

Jaelene Hinkle is arguably the best left fullback in women's soccer.

And she said no to an opportunity to play for our national team in 2017, because she didn't feel right about wearing a gay pride jersey.

Consequently, she lost her spot, and was never invited back.

That's going to happen. More and more. More and more of us are going to lose our spots, lose our jobs, and lose our diplomas for being a faithful witness.

Don't let it deter you. Decide right now what's more important: the truth or your livelihood; the Gospel, or your grade. Jesus or sports.

Decide right now, to be *faithful* – a faithful *witness*.

On the other hand, to be a faithful . . .

Follower: Don't be swayed by naysayers

Critics. Cynics. Like the unbelieving Jews in v2, who *stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds*. They were naysayers. Protesters.

And while *some* were swayed, others weren't. *Some sided with the Jews* [v4] *and some with the apostles*. The latter being *faithful* followers. Un-swayed.

And so must we. Just because people are *naysayers* about what you believe, doesn't mean they're right. Just because a *crowd* is protesting, doesn't mean it's legit.

And just because someone makes accusations against those who *preach* the Gospel, those who are faithful *witnesses*, doesn't mean they're true.

Don't be swayed. Be a *faithful* follower. That's the first set of principles. (**Summary**)

➤ The second, comes from v8-18:

[8] *Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked.* [9] *He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well,* [10] *said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking.*

[11] *And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!"* [12] *Barnabas they called Zeus* [the supreme god in Greek mythology], *and Paul, Hermes* [the messenger of the gods], *because he was the chief speaker.* [13] *And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer*

sacrifice with the crowds.

[14] But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments [a sign of great grief or disapproval] and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, [15] “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.

Turn to the one who really is all-powerful.

[16] In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. [17] Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” [In other words, though he let you go astray, he still showed himself good by blessing you. And yet . . .] [18] Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

To be a faithful . . .

Witness: Don’t hesitate to urge people to repent (v8-18)

Like Paul and Barnabas in v14. They *rushed* into the crowd. They didn’t hesitate.

And cried out in v15 – you should turn from these vain things, to a living God.

Do you see it? That’s repentance. They urged them to turn from one belief, one practice, to another. In this case, from the error of *vain things* – useless religious practices . . .

Like offering sacrifices to *men* – to *fruitful* things; like worshipping God; the *living* God. Useful in *every* respect. Turn from that, to him. Repent.

Even Paul’s command to the *crippled* man was a picture of repentance. (10)

He ceased sitting, and started standing. He stopped doubting, and started believing.

If you’re going to be a faithful witness, don’t hesitate to urge people to repent.

Exhorting them to forsake error and embrace truth; turn from sin and live for Christ.

On the other hand, as a faithful . . .

Follower: Don’t wait to turn and believe

You may not worship Zeus or some other idol. You may not believe something off the deep end. But if you don’t believe in Jesus and turn from your sin . . .

Including your false belief, you’re in trouble.

Because you’re headed toward an eternity without God in the throes of hell. Guilty of your *own* idolatry by putting *yourself* first.

Don’t go there. And don’t wait. Turn from your sin and self, to God and the Gospel – the good news of Jesus. Turn from *your* way, to his. As I speak.

And if you already have, don’t hesitate to urge others to do the same.

Be a faithful *follower*, and then a faithful *witness*. Both/and.

That’s the *second* duo. (Summary)

➤ The third, comes from v19-23:

[19] But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium [to Lystra], and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.

[20] But when the disciples gathered about him [no doubt praying], he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.

[21] When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, [22] 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. [23] And when they had appointed elders for them in every church [one of the reasons we do the same], with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

To be a faithful . . .

Witness: Don’t be defeated by pain and suffering (v19-23)

Persevere. Stay in the ring. *Fight* the good fight.

Far from being defeated, Paul actually went *back* to Lystra after being stoned; back to the haters. V20 says *he rose up and entered the city*.

And then went to *Derbe* the next day (20b). He kept going.

And as if *that* wasn’t enough, he *retraced* his steps to the cities he had visited, when he could have made a beeline back to port that was shorter and easier.

Instead of being defeated by pain and suffering, he persevered. He modeled it.

And, taught it. Paul *taught* us to not be defeated. V22b.

Through many tribulations [he said] *we must enter the kingdom of God*.

The path to heaven is marked with hardship. Not *all* the time, thank goodness. And not without the presence of the *Spirit*. But marked it is. Difficulties await.

And forewarned is forearmed. That’s why Paul said it. So that we wouldn’t be defeated.

Paul modeled it, Paul taught it, and God blesses it. He blesses our perseverance in the midst of pain and suffering.

Like using Paul to save souls, establish churches, and appoint elders. That’s a blessing.

To be *used* by God for the *kingdom* of God.

As is his commendation of “well done good and faithful servant” when we *die*. It’s a blessing. Not to mention his provision to sustain us *now*.

Don’t be defeated by pain and suffering. Follow Paul’s example and look to God’s blessing. Get up, go back, move on, and keep going. That’s a *faithful* witness.

And to be a faithful . . .

Follower: Don’t be fooled by prosperity peddlers

Those who say that God will *keep* you from pain and suffering if you only have faith, if you only *give* enough, if you only *do* enough, trust enough, pray enough.

It’s garbage. Every last part of it. Contrary to the Scriptures and spiritually abusive.

And so is the more mainstream version that says the Christian life is a life of bliss because God is a God of love.

“You shouldn’t suffer. If you’re suffering, something’s wrong. Do something else. Get out from under it. God loves you and has a *wonderful* plan for your life.”

That too is garbage. It just smells better.

Not that he *doesn’t* have a plan for your life; he does. And you don’t have to worry about finding it.

Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you (Mt 6:33). Seek him, and his plan will take care of itself.

But his plan may not always *feel* good.

We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, but that doesn't mean it will always *feel* good. (Rom 8:28)

So don't be fooled by those who say it does and should. Those who imply such things.

More often than not, they're *lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God*.

Having *the appearance of godliness, but denying its power*. (2 Tim 3:4)

Preaching to suit the passions of their hearers instead of the passions of God. (2Tim 4:3)

Don't be fooled by such prosperity peddlers. Be a *faithful* follower. (**Summary**)

➤ Which brings us to the last pair of "how to's" from v24-28:

[24] Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia [two regions]. [25] And when they had spoken the word in Perga [near the coast], they went down to Attalia [on the coast; modern day Antalya where one of our global partners resides], [26] and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. [27] And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. [28] And they remained no little time with the disciples.

To be a faithful . . .

Witness: Don't neglect to recount the work of God (v24-28)

Whether it's Paul and Barnabas returning to their sending church after a year and a half of *planting* churches; or you, returning to your Discipleship Group . . .

After a week and a half of planting seeds. Gospel seeds.

Don't neglect to report what God did. V27 – *When they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them*. They recounted it.

Don't neglect that. Don't rob God of his fame and renown. Don't miss the chance to encourage the saints and build up the church.

Maybe it's what he did in you to sanctify and purify your heart the previous week.

Maybe it's how he spoke to you in your devotions or prayers.

Maybe it's how he used you to minister to someone.

Whatever the case, recount it. Be a *faithful* witness.

And when it comes to being a faithful . . .

Follower: Don't fail to gather and hear it

Like the disciples in Antioch. V27 – When Paul and Barnabas arrived, they *gathered the church together* to hear them. Don't fail at that.

You *need* the encouragement. You *need* the sharpening. You *need* the fellowship. You *need* to hear about God from others.

And your brothers and sisters need *you*.

So be a faithful follower who gathers and *hears*, and a faithful witness who gathers and tells. (**Summary**) Both/and.

Prayer – God, give us the desire. The desire to be faithful. Forgive us for shrinking back when we should step up. Forgive us for seeking ease at the expense of obedience. Bolster us to speak, and work, and live, as both witnesses *and* followers.