

3 Provisions for Strengthening Souls

The Book of Acts

By Marc Bertrand

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Acts 14:19-28; 2 Corinthians 11:21-29
Preached on: Sunday, June 24, 2018

Walsh Baptist
210 Sovereign St
Simcoe, ON
N3Y 4K1

Website: www.walshbaptistchurch.weebly.com/
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/walshbaptist

I'd like to invite you to turn in your Bibles to Acts 14. This is our last week here in Acts 14. Last week, well, we've been in Lystra, Iconium and then Lystra and then in Derbe but in Lystra where we were for the last couple of weeks, in Lystra when Paul and Barnabas showed up, the crowds were so excited that they were ready to worship them as gods but not as the one true God, they thought they were Hermes and Zeus come down from the heavens, and Paul and Barnabas with much difficulty came out carrying their robes and preached to them of the general revelation and said, "God is revealed all around you and he is not an idol that you should serve him this way." And he invites the people to come and know Jesus Christ, and very interestingly, within a couple of weeks people from Iconium and Antioch, places where he had already been, come down. The Jews raising all sorts of trouble against Paul and Barnabas and they take hold of Paul and Barnabas, we saw this last week, and they drag him out of the city, actually they don't, they stone them in the city and they drag his body out thinking him to be dead and leave him there on the ground. And we looked at how the new disciples gathered around him and saw him rise up and then go on to Derbe to preach the gospel there and make disciples, and we pick up the story and we're going to just look at this text one more time because I want you to see the priority of the Apostle Paul in strengthening souls.

Acts 14. We pick it up here. We'll tell the story again at verse 19.

19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, 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, 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 [now this I want you to see] they returned to Lystra [that's where they stoned him] and to Iconium [that's where they almost stoned him] and to Antioch [that's where they threw him out on his ear], 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, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the

Lord in whom they had believed. 24 Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. 25 And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, 26 and from there they sailed to Antioch [this is a different 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.

Heavenly Father, we come before you, Lord, to the very heart of our worship. Lord, we have sung hymns that express, Lord, our love for you, our delight in you, our hope in you. Lord, we have prayed, lifting up, Lord, the sick and the needy and our church, and we have spoken to you, Lord, of the things that are upon our hearts but, Lord, we come now to open your word, believing, Lord, that you continue to speak to us. Lord, speak to us today. Lord, we know that the promise of your word is that your word goes forth and will not return to you void, that it goes forth with power, that it goes forth like a sharp two-edged sword. And yet, Lord, how often we are dull of hearing, how easily we can sit in front of a computer for an hour and watch meaningless empty things on YouTube, or watch television or sports and give ourselves for hours to this, and how hard we find it, Lord, simply to give this half hour of attention to your word. Lord, I pray that you would make us diligent to hear. Father, I pray that we might have all of the benefits that come from sitting under the preaching of your word and the hearing of it, Lord, that the Holy Spirit might have liberty in our hearts, Lord, to work. Lord, here is a congregation, Lord, who have come for various reasons. Father, I pray that you would do a work in them. I pray, Father, that they would go out youngest to eldest, Lord, knowing you, desiring you, being built up and strengthened, Lord, in soul, Father, prepared for the afflictions and sufferings that are sure to come upon them, Father, persevering in their faith, heeding, Father, the elders that you have established and trusting, Lord, that you will guard that which you have given to us. Lord, give to us ears to hear. Give to me, Lord, unction from your Spirit to preach with clarity and power. These things I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

I want to begin today not in Acts, I want to go to 2 Corinthians. 2 Corinthians is a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote sometime later but if you'll turn to 2 Corinthians 11 and we're going to pick up in verse 21, you'll see there's relevance here to the passage in Acts 14. The Apostle Paul is writing, this is the second recorded letter we have to the Corinthians and he's writing to them because they've come under some false teaching and some false teachers have come in who are boastful and bragging and saying, "That Apostle Paul, you don't want to follow him. He's a small man. He's not very eloquent with his words." And the Apostle Paul writes these things to rebut and to rebuke these false teachers. He says, "These false teachers have been boasting and bragging before you." He says, "They're not the only ones that can boast. You want to hear boasting?" He says, "I will boast." Here it is. You're there, 2 Corinthians 11, you'll hear the reference to the stoning in Lystra. Middle of verse 21,

21 ... But whatever anyone else dares to boast of--I am speaking as a fool-- I also dare to boast of that. 22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they

Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. 23 Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one--I am talking like a madman--with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. 24 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

Pause for a moment. Young people, don't let anybody tell you that Christianity is boring or empty or meaningless. It's dangerous and if you're going to be a Christian, you're going to follow Jesus, you're going to do that faithfully, you may suffer, in fact, you will suffer. We're living in a time and a day and an age where it becomes even more certain that if you will be faithful to Jesus Christ, it will be at great cost to yourself. You hear this long list, the Apostle Paul says, "They're servants of Christ, I'm a servant of Christ. Here's the evidence." He takes off his shirt and he shows them the scars on his back, and the beatings, and the times in prison, and likely the infections that he suffered, adrift in the sea, shipwrecked, stoned and left for dead, all of these things.

Now here's an interesting thing because in our passage here we heard about the stoning, dragged out, left for dead, gets up, goes on to Derbe, preaches the gospel. He says that was a little bit risky, worked out okay, nobody beat him up in Derbe, but then the next part of this passage he says, "And then I went back to Lystra, and then up to Iconium, and then on to Antioch." And you go, why? They already have the gospel. There's already disciples that have been made. The church is already established. Why would Paul risk so much going back to the place where they had just left him for dead? And he does this over and over again. This is the model of the ministry of the Apostle Paul.

Here we're going to continue in 2 Corinthians 11, right there at verse 28 it says, "And, apart from other things." Apart from other things, what other things? He's just given us this long list, all the physical sufferings, all the abuses, all the stonings and beatings and floggings and imprisonments, not only that, the dangers, the risks that could have happened to him on the road, dangers from robbers, dangers from the Jews, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers everywhere. And apart from these things, apart from this list, we've got this list on this side, all the things that were suffered or could have been suffered by the Apostle Paul,

28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

This is a different thing. These are all the sufferings, the beatings, the torments, the tortures. This is something different. He says, "There's an anxiety that weighs upon me every day for the churches."

29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

This is the heart of a true pastor. The heart of your pastor. We've got a number of folks that are visiting here. I've met most of you from different churches. This is the heart of your pastor. You realize that your pastor doesn't preach sermons on Sunday, go home and begin to prep next week's sermon and think not a thing of you, he is burdened for you, he is praying for you, he is pleading for you. Your faces go through his mind and he thinks about your situation and he knows the temptations that are before some of you, and he knows the sufferings that have come upon some of you, and he is anxious for his church, that some of you be led astray by false teachers, or tempted by the devil, or overcome by afflictions so great that you abandon your faith. This is the heart of a pastor. You want to know why does the Apostle Paul go back? It's because this is heavier than all of this. He says, "I go back, they're going to beat me up again, they may imprison me again, they may revile me again. I don't go back, I may not confirm these believers in their walk and some of them may turn out to be false believers and be lost."

Let's look at one other passage before we get right into Acts. Turn over to 1 Thessalonians 2. This is one of the first letters that the Apostle Paul wrote, probably wrote this in the middle of his second missionary journey because in the midst of the second missionary journey, we haven't gotten there yet, he is thrust out. That's not unusual. He gets thrust out of places and ends up walking away from brand new baby Christians. How much gospel do you need to be a disciple and for that gospel to blossom forth so that the person lives forever for Christ? Well, the evidence is not an awful lot. All it needs is the Holy Spirit to plant that in the person's heart.

But here's what happens, 1 Thessalonians 2:17. We hear this same thing. I want you to see this. This is this side the anxiety, the weight that sits in the heart of a pastor. Listen to Paul.

17 But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, 18 because we wanted to come to you--I, Paul, again and again--but Satan hindered us. 19 For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? 20 For you are our glory and joy.

You want to understand something about the heart of a pastor? He is anxious and burdened and concerned and weighed down for the souls of his people, that they should believe, that they should continue and persevere. What is his joy, his glory and his crown? Your safekeeping, your faith, your continuance. This is it, "Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy."

Go on to chapter 3, he says,

1 Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, 2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, 3 that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. 4 For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. 5 For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.

We find this pattern in the Apostle Paul, it comes up again and again. The Apostle Paul anxious and concerned, not a sinful anxiety but a godly anxiety and concern for the church. He says, "I want to know." There's no cellphones. There's no Facebook. There's no way to get a status report out of Thessalonica. He says, "I know I got thrust out and it was in the midst of a great deal of suffering, and I know affliction has poured down onto the church. Has it just extinguished the whole thing and there's not a spark to be found?" And so he sends Timothy and the word comes back, "No, the church is fine. They have survived in the midst of affliction."

But we see these three things. Paul is consistently concerned that the devil might tempt a person away, that he might put things before you that just look so delicious that you go, "I would prefer the world to Christ," and walk away. He's concerned that false teachers might come in and present to you something that is not the gospel. Read Galatians, "I am so surprised that you so quickly turn aside from the things that we have taught you to another gospel, but it is no gospel at all." The concern of the Apostle Paul, false teachers. Satan tempting us away, false teachers, and then the one that really comes up here is that somehow affliction or suffering might be so great that a person turns aside, rejects God and says, "I don't believe these things."

We come to our text here and in Acts 14 we hear these words. We're really going to focus just on a couple verses here. Verse 21 says this, "When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch," verse 22, listen, "strengthening the souls of the disciples." We want to ask the question: what does the Apostle Paul do to strengthen the souls of not the apostles, the disciples? Do you ever feel like your soul is weak? You ever feel like you're just exposed to every sort of storm that comes along and that you're just trembling in the wind? Do you feel like you might have a weak soul? This is the Apostle Paul, he says, "I want to strengthen the soul of the disciples." So how does Paul strengthen the souls of the disciples and how do we as a church seek to strengthen the souls of believers? I think there are three things that the Apostle Paul does here. We see him strengthen the souls by instruction. He says to you, "Here is something that you can do to make strong your own soul, having trusted in Christ." And then second, we see him strengthen the souls of the believers by appointing elders. And then finally we see him strengthen the souls of believers by committing them to God.

So here's how the rest of this sermon is going to go. It's kind of an upside down pyramid in length. This first point, strengthening the souls by instruction, we're going to give most of our time to that; and then strengthening the souls by appointing of elders, we're going to give a little bit of time to that; and then strengthening the souls by committing them to God is so straightforward I'm just going to give you a brief explanation and then we're going to apply that.

So let's look into this a little bit. We see here strengthening the souls of disciples, verse 22, two things he does to strengthen them by teaching: encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying to them through many afflictions or through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. Okay, so he's talking to believers, he's talking to those who have believed, and he says these two things. First of all, he says, "I want to encourage you, continue in the faith." What's that mean? And then secondly he says to them, "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." What does it mean "continue in the faith"? Well, let's define two words here. Ready? You're going to think for a minute, not going to sleep, we're going to think. We're going to continue, we want to know what that word means, and faith maybe means something more than what you think.

So that word "continue" comes out of a Greek word "meno" and that word is the same word that was translated in John 15 when Jesus in his very famous way said, "I am the vine, you are the branches. If you meno in me, you will bear my fruit." If you know that passage, "If you abide in me, you will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing." So Jesus uses this word in John 15 saying to the disciples, "Remain in me or continue in me, or persevere in me, meno," and the Apostle Paul uses it here when he says to the new believers, to the new disciples, "Meno, continue, remain, abide in the faith."

Okay, so we've got that first word, "continue," what's the second word here, "faith"? Think about that for a minute. You go, "I know this." If somebody asks what is faith, you say, "Well, faith means..." What? Believing something, right? Trusting something. That's the most common meaning of the word "faith" when we find it in Scripture. When Scripture calls a person to believe, believe, Acts 16:31, Philippian jailer about to kill himself, Paul says, "We're all still here." The man says, "What must I do to be saved?" And he says, "Believe." Faith. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that whosoever believe," faith, believe, trust. Right, we know that word, but you know, there's another way that we can hear the word "faith" in Scripture. We see it sometimes written and it says in this particular text, it says, "continue in," and then we get, "the," the little word "the," t-h-e, "the faith." Okay? So there's something else beyond simply belief, simply trust. I mean, that is that initial point when a person recognizes Jesus is the Savior and recognizes themselves as a sinner, and they say, "I believe he can save me. I trust in him. I'm putting my faith on his righteousness." That's faith, but then we can also talk about "the faith," and what's "the faith"? "The faith" is the content of the thing that I'm trusting in, okay? It's what I'm believing in. I am believing that Jesus Christ is my righteousness; that he is the one who has paid my debt; that he has stood in my place and received what God should have given to me and gave to him instead that I

might receive what belonged to him. That's "the faith" and we could keep on going, "the faith" expands to take in all these things that are the doctrines and the teachings of the church.

This entire book defines for us "the faith," and so Paul is not simply saying, "Keep on believing, keep on trusting." He's not saying, "Continue believing." He is saying that but he's saying something more, he says, "Continue in the faith." Jude says this when he says, "Contend for the faith that is once for all entrusted to the saints." We could get this in Philippians or Colossians. In Philippians we hear, "Only let," this is Philippians 1:27, "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel." Okay, when you hear that, it is belief, it is trust but it's more than that, it's the doctrines and the creeds and the things that are taught that we believe in, okay? He says, "Keep on going."

Let me make this really really simple just so that you're not lost on this. I learned to swim when I was, I don't know, 8 or 10. Some of you have learned how to swim. I mean, there's the kind of swimming you do when you fall in and your arms are going like this and you're just trying to stay afloat and you need a lifeguard to probably come in and help you in a few minutes. But some of you know how to swim, you can put on some goggles, you might even put on a swim cap, you put your face into the water, your arms are moving like this, you have learned the technique so you know how to swim, but you've never actually developed any sort of capacity so if you got dropped off a boat a kilometer offshore in the lake, you'd probably drown even though you know how to swim. A very imperfect illustration.

I just want you to see, though, that there's a putting these things into practice creates a capacity, an ability, and so the Apostle Paul is really saying to them, "Listen, you have trusted in this gospel and it's the gospel that has saved you. You're saved by faith. You're saved by grace. You're not saved by works." But he says, "Keep on believing. Keep on practicing these things. Get into these things. Learn these things. Spend time in these things. This is what you can do for yourself." How much time do you spend in the word of God when you're not in church? You all own a Bible so take up the Bible and read. How much time do you spend praying when you're not in church or not about to eat a meal? Take up prayer and begin to pray. Continue in the faith, this is the Apostle Paul. How does the church manage to strengthen their soul? By continuing in the faith, by abiding in these things, by remaining in these things, by continuing here. So that's one thing he says.

He says, "Continue in the faith," but there's a second aspect, he says, "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. The prosperity gospel, which is very popular, you can find, if you go to Walmart and look at bestselling books, chances are the majority of bestselling books that people say, "Well, that's a Christian book," are prosperity gospel books, how to have your best life now. Friends, if you have your best life now, your next life will be hell, okay? This is not the message of the gospel and it's the lie of the devil. The devil

would love for you to believe that this is what God is offering to you is prosperity and health and wealth and wonderful wonderful things in the next few years. The devil would love for you to believe that. Why? Because it's very easy for him to cast you out later on when things start to go badly and you go, "I didn't sign up for this. I didn't sign up for my business to go down. I didn't sign up for my job to be lost. I didn't sign up for Alzheimer's or for cancer or any of this kind of stuff. I signed up for prosperity and health and wealth." That's why the health and wealth gospel is disastrous for the church and should never be preached.

Over and over again what does the Apostle Paul preach? The Apostle Paul says, "Listen, affliction is going to come on you. If you trust Jesus, you're going to be persecuted." But it's not just the persecution element, there is a reality there that you may be persecuted for believing in Jesus Christ but here's the other element, is that all the things that happen to everybody else, those things happen to Christians too. You've been around the church long enough to know that this is the reality. The gospel promises all will be well. All will be well but not right away. Some of you are going to suffer. All of us are going to suffer but some will suffer terribly. Some will have nothing but hardship and difficulty for years and years and years. Are you going to abandon Christ and say, "This isn't worth it"? Paul says it is worth it. Paul lists the things, this is worth it. Why? My favorite passage, I think, on this is the current sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory to be revealed. All of the best days of your life have yet to come, all of the most glorious things. You have seen glorious things, you have perceived things that are fantastic, you have felt the rush of emotion when you think, "Wow, that good-looking girl over there likes me," you know? I know you young people. You know, you go, "Wow! I feel alive! I'm excited! This is great!" All of your best days are before you. You haven't tasted anything yet.

Here is the promise of the gospel, "All things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose." The promise of God, rest on it, trust on it, believe it, and know this, that your best friend may die tomorrow, that you may lose your mom and dad in an accident, that you may suffer some debilitating thing or illness yourself, that all of your plans for this life may come to nothing. And God isn't promising that isn't going to happen. The best wall that you can put up against that false teaching that says, "Well, if you just had more faith, everything would be well," is to say, "That's the lie of the devil. God didn't promise me that but he promised me life eternal with Christ in heaven."

So the Apostle Paul says, "Through much suffering we must enter the kingdom of heaven. Don't be thrown off by the suffering when it comes upon you. Take hold of the Lord Jesus Christ, look to him because he has set the path before you, looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." When you have suffered more than Christ has suffered, you have a reason to say, "I complain, God." But until that moment he says, "Keep on walking looking unto Jesus."

So the first thing and the longest portion of this sermon that Paul does to strengthen the soul of believers, the first thing is to say to them, "Keep on in your faith, every day in your faith, grow in your faith, live in your faith, make your faith the thing that is you. Live there and remember that through much suffering we must enter the kingdom of heaven." The second thing that he does is he sets up elders. It says here, "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." It's interesting almost every gospel, almost every New Testament book refers to elders. Who are these elders? Well, the elder is, another one way of speaking of elders is to speak of pastors but I think it's more than that. I think the Apostle Paul set up a plurality of elders and I think there were more than one elder in every church. I think a lot of these elders probably were not full-time paid people but we get these synonyms, these same names, elder or presbyter, or bishop, or overseer in all of these different texts. This speaks of the people that God has called out in order to do something, in order to strengthen the souls of disciples.

And just to give you a little snippet because this isn't actually a sermon on elders or pastors but rather on the strengthening of the church, I just want you to see the list that the Apostle Paul puts down in 1 Timothy, okay? So in 1 Timothy 3 the Apostle Paul gives two lists. He says elders and deacons. We're going to look at the elders' list for just a minute and we're just going to look at it because we want to understand what is it that Paul is doing as he risks his life to go through Lystra, Iconium and Antioch to strengthen the souls of the disciples by teaching them to remain in the faith and to endure suffering but also by establishing elders. Why is he establishing elders, because that's the second thing he's doing. Here's the list, 1 Timothy 3, "Therefore an overseer," another word for elder, "must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil." We could obviously preach sermons on this text but I just want you to see a couple things.

Do you see that list? Paul is setting up and establishing elders in each of these places to strengthen the soul. So he's looking for men who are self-controlled, faithful to their wives, careful in their thoughts, respectable and hospitable and able to teach, that's key. The elder has got to be able to teach. Well, why, the people can read it for themselves. Yes, they can. People should study it for themselves. Yes, they should. People should continue in their faith and remain in their faith and endure in their faith. Yes, they should. People can do that all by themselves, they don't need somebody else to teach them that. Yes, they can and yet consistently what do we see in Scripture is that God says, "Listen, be diligent in these things. Persevere in these things. Continue in these things." Then he sets up for you people who are able to teach, people who are able to prepare for you a meal so that you can be nourished spiritually and grow.

So Paul's first provision is to instruct the new believers to take responsibility for their own spiritual life, and his second provision is to appoint someone who will make it their business to take care of the souls of the church by caring for them, by feeding them, by teaching them, by shepherding them. So the Apostle Paul says, "Look to your faith and persevere in it," and then he sets up people who are able to teach and instruct, and then finally we see this, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. That's not just, there's no words in the Bible that are superfluous or empty or just thrown in there because somebody had to finish a sentence. When you see it, it means something, that he committed them to the Lord. That's not just a nice way to finish the sentence, that means the Apostle Paul before he left Lystra or Iconium or Antioch or any other place he had gone, having instructed the people on how to strengthen their own soul, having established elders to help strengthen their soul, got down on his knees and said, "God, I'm committing this congregation to you. I may never see these people again. I may never have contact again with some of these people but, Lord, I am committing them to you," and there is a faith and a trust there that God is more powerful than the elders of that church and more powerful and more capable than the people in that congregation.

Here is the good news of Scripture, as you seek to continue and persevere in your faith, there will come times when you will falter and when you will fail. You will be overcome with temptation and you will go away from the Lord. You may come into some false teaching and for a while imbibe that and be distracted from the Lord. You may be overwhelmed with suffering and for a time that may just overwhelm you. These things happen. We have the evidence in Scripture that these things sometimes come upon a person. That's not the final word on the matter. You will have elders who fail. There are no perfect elders or pastors or bishops or presbyters in the church, they're all human and they will all fall short and fail. They will fail in their teaching. They will fail in their care for you. God will never fail and so it is that we commit you to the Lord's keeping and we say, "God, keep those that you have saved. Keep those who you have saved." And the doctrine of Scripture is that God, Jesus says, "My Father who has given them to me is greater than I, and none will go from his hand."

So the Apostle Paul says, "Father, keep these. Keep these." If you feel yourself weak, exposed, not strong in soul, what should you do? Begin by praying, "God, I am weak but you are strong. Keep me, Lord." Go to your pastors and your elders and say, "I feel weak and I want to be strong. Help me." God put them there for a reason. Persevere in your faith. Keep on believing. Keep on living in the faith that God has given you.

Let me pray for you.

Father, God, Lord, you know the people, the hearts, the souls that you have drawn to this place today. Lord, you know their need. Lord, we are reminded of the passage in Scripture if you think that you are standing strong, be careful that you do not fall. Lord, I pray that if there are those here today who are in an easy place, Lord, we give thanks for those days and those times and those weeks and years when things seem easy. Lord, help us not to take them for granted but, Lord, also in these times, Lord, help us to be diligent, to persevere, to continue on, to remain, Lord, in these things that we have been taught, to

learn in them, to grow in them, to build up, Lord, a strong capacity for living in your grace. For those who are in affliction, Lord, to be reminded that you have suffered affliction and that you have promised, Lord, that these days would come upon us but that you will hold us fast. Father, we give you thanks for the provisions that you have made. We give you thanks, Lord, that the inheritance to come is far greater than anything we have ever seen or imagined here. Lord, for all of these things we are grateful, for these things, Lord, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.