

Scripture Reading:

Acts 14: “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 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, 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, 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.”

"Paul Ministers to the Churches"

With our annual church meeting coming up in just a few weeks, our text brings us to a very timely passage this morning. It is a passage that speaks of discipleship and church leadership, subjects that we should take very seriously. And yet they are verses which could be easily passed over here in Luke's orderly account: As Luke has told the story of how the Spirit of God is going to fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus we have seen three major events or actions:

- 1) There have been miracles**
- 2) There have been persecutions**
- 3) There has been ministry**

We saw this in Jerusalem with the healing of the man who was lame, the persecution of Stephan and the other Saints by Saul and the passages about the early community life of the church.

Now we see the same pattern here among the Gentiles: Miracles have followed the Apostles including the healing of a man born lame, they have been persecuted in almost every town, including the stoning of Paul and now we see the Apostles ministering to those who have been saved and appointing elders.

Now I think if we are honest we tend to focus on the first two: We talk about the miracles and the persecutions and quietly pass over the verses about community life and proper ministry. I would also argue that these same three types of events happen in our lives and we have the same focus:

In our Christian walk we will have exciting experiences, we will have trials and we should have obedience. We get excited about the experiences, we don't much like the trials although we spend a great deal of time talking about them and sadly we often ignore or avoid the issue of obedience.

Now when I speak of experiences I am not just thinking about the miracle services with healings that we talked about last week. I am thinking of experiences that we should have in a normal Christian life:

If we come to Christ later in life there is the experience of conversion and if we are raised as a faithful covenant child there are those times of testing where we affirm that we are following Jesus with all our heart & mind.

However, the Scripture warns us against staying in our infant state, but calls us to maturity rather than keeping our focus on or trying to duplicate past experiences.

When we come each week to worship the Triune God this should certainly be an experience that we look forward to but again if the experience becomes the focus then we are diverted from the real purpose of worship which is to prepare us for service in the Kingdom. We can see this in many forms today:

The Charismatics focus on the experience of worship to the point where most of what they do looks very weird to the world and many other believers.

If we look at the more traditional churches who have often wandered far from the Gospel, they have beautiful services in stunning cathedrals where the experience is very other worldly.

Seeker friendly churches have tried to counter these problems by making the worship experience more accessible and acceptable to the world which makes everyone more comfortable, but sadly also more worldly.

Even in reformed circles where we strive to follow only what the Bible commands regarding worship we have often fallen into our own type of experience that feels very good about how RIGHT we have gotten everything, in the end very proud of ourselves.

As we have often said, experiences and even miracles can be a regular part of the Christian life, BUT we must always remember that they are to be under the control of the Holy Spirit and that He desires to use them to accomplish His Kingdom purposes and not just to make us feel good or special.

They are to be a part of a balanced Christian walk where we see all of the situations that are modeled for us here in Acts: Experiences, Trials, And obedience. This is what we have in our text where the Apostle Paul encourages these young Christians to “continue in the faith” and reminding them “that through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God.”

So as we saw last week, trials are not to be a surprise in the Christian life: They are a normal part of our growth, but again, just like experiences they cannot become the sole focus: We often do this either by always dwelling on our problems or trying to ignore the problems pretending that the Christians life is supposed to be all peaches and cream.

- Both errors put the focus on US rather than on the Holy Spirit who uses these trials to build the Kingdom.
- Again, in our flesh, we love the experiences, we hate the trials and we mostly ignore obedience.

However, we must also remember that problems can easily arise in the third area of obedience as well...

When it comes to obedience, we often see one of two extremes: On the one hand folks will cry we are under grace and not law so it does not much matter how we act [this makes ignoring obedience much easier].

- Our “freedom” in Christ quickly becomes a license for sin!

The ditch on the other side of that road is legalism where we become focused on outward conformity to a bunch of achievable rules [*often the result of feeling guilty about not taking obedience seriously*].

As Jesus warned the Pharisees, those who travel down this road get real good at keeping very detailed rules about minor things like washing cups, but forget the weightier matters of the Law and the real life He came to give. The reason for this is simple: In our flesh we can manage to remember how to wash the cups, but only under the influence of the Holy Spirit can we learn to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbor as our self!

That is the real work of the Kingdom and it will only be accomplished as we keep all of our experiences, trials and obedience in proper balance under the Spirit’s control.

- This is the hard work of the Christian life but it is also the easy yoke that Jesus tells us to carry!

It is here where the rubber meets the road for the shepherds who are called to care for the sheep: Good leadership will help keep the balance and not wonder off into only one area.

As I reflected on this in my preparations this week, I realized that you could even argue that the Church calendar follows this pattern and comes with the same temptations: With Advent, Christmas and Epiphany we enjoy the experience of the Incarnation: God with us!

- We all love Advent & Christmas!

But then we come to the hard teachings of the Gospel and we see Jesus go to the cross and bear the punishment for our sins, which if we are not careful can cloud the glory of the resurrection. We can be offended by the cross and in our flesh join with Peter wanting a different way, but there is no way to Easter morning but through Calvary.

The Good News is that Jesus is raised in power and ascends in glory and now the Comforter has been sent to empower us to live the Christian life which is what is focused on in the ordinary time or normal time of the Church calendar.

- Again, our flesh does not want to go there, and we often want to just go back to the joy of Christmas and focus on the baby Jesus!

The balanced Christian life does in fact embrace the joy of Christmas each and every year, but we remember that the baby Jesus came to be the once-for-all sacrifice for sin showing how God triumphs over all our trials and temptations, leading us into new life in Christ where we hear and follow the words of Jesus: “If you love me, keep my commandments.”

So we see here in Acts miracles, persecutions and now ministry. I hope you can see how they relate to the experiences, the trials and the calls to obedience that we have in our own Christian lives. If we do, we will be much less likely to pass over this morning’s text on our way to the next adventure in Acts.

As Paul and Barnabas journey through the various cities they have faced hostile crowds and rejection, but they have also preached the Gospel and seen conversions.

- What we have this morning is their being faithful to ALL of the great commission.

The Great Commission does not say go and evangelize the world. It is not simply focused on revival meetings where people get saved. It does involve preaching the Good News but the Apostles demonstrate how Jesus called us to disciple the nations, which means they must deal with all the experiences, trials and obedience that come with conversion.

These Apostles went forward with the confidence that ALL authority had been given to Jesus:

- They boldly preached trusting that God would give saving faith.
- They faced violent trials knowing that the Spirit was in control.
- And now they would NOT ignore the final part of the command to teach the new converts to observe all that Jesus had commanded!

They encouraged the new Saints to continue in the faith, to see the trials as part of the path into the Kingdom and they appointed elders to guide them and committed them to the Lord with prayer and fasting! Paul and Barnabas were not revival preachers who passed through town, got some people saved and moved on!

Yes, there were real conversions but their desire was not to count converts but to build churches!

We will see the Apostle Paul cover a LOT of territory in the Book of Acts, but we will also see time and time again where he returns to encourage the Saints and strengthen the churches.

- As Pastor West often told many of us, it is easy to build a crowd, it is hard work to build a church.

We have often talked about the importance of covenant faithfulness and the test for that is always where the next generation goes. We see the balance here in Acts of taking the Good News to those who need to hear it AND encouraging and strengthening those who have been converted. This is another one of those tensions in the Christian life that we looked at last week, and again if we don't feel such tension we are not being faithful!

So how do we strive for covenant faithfulness? How do we bring up the 2nd & 3rd generations of faithful Christians? I would argue that we have the proper model here in Acts:

- We must keep those experiences that we love in balance with the other parts of our Christians walk.
- We must trust the Holy Spirit as we enter the Kingdom through many tribulations
- We must commit ourselves to faithful service in that Kingdom.

We see this in the life of Jesus when we consider how He discipled His own disciples:

-- In the midst of many miracles Jesus warned them about people who came only for the miracles.

-- With men who over and over again said they were willing to die for Jesus, He continually warned them that they would be scattered when troubles came but that God would stay with them

-- And Jesus always points to obedience as the final proof of one's love.

His example of obedience that took Him to the cross and the challenge of obedience that He gives all who say they love Him: IF you love me, keep my commandments.

So if we are going to be serious about obedience today, we need to take just a moment to focus on verse twenty-three where Luke tells us that they appointed elders in every church. While this can be quickly passed over, it gives us two important things to consider in our modern age:

- The first is that there were churches to appoint elders over!

Again, Paul and Barnabas brought real conversions and those people were serious about following Jesus!

We are not given the number of new believers nor how long the Apostles spent in each area, but the end result is that we have churches in these towns that needed leadership.

Here in America today we have a real crisis regarding how people view the importance of the Church and yet here in the earliest days of Gentile conversions Luke tells us that Churches were forming and that they were important!

- Many of the New Testament Epistles we are still instructed by were written to such early churches.
- Jesus addressed seven churches with specific letters in the Book of Revelation
- And here we have Paul and Barnabas taking the time to find leaders for these young churches!

So the second point to consider is how this might challenge some of our thinking today about leadership... I am pretty sure none of these men went off and attended seminary before they were appointed as elders! On the other hand we see prayer and fasting as they sought out the right men to serve.

The Spirit has left us with three of Paul's letters to the young men Timothy and Titus to guide us in regard to choosing our own church leadership.

These same principles would have guided Paul and Barnabas in the selection of elders here, but I think a lesson we can learn is to not let the ideal become the enemy of the good. Would the men chosen at this point to lead these young churches been ideal candidates to pastor some of our churches today?

Probably not, but what about new churches forming in mission fields today?

The important thing to remember is that Paul & Barnabas committed this to prayer and fasting and understood the importance of having church leadership in place.

- **Did it solve all the problems for these churches?**
- **Well obviously based on what we see in some of Paul's epistles and the letters in Revelation they did go on to have some serious problems.**

Does this mean that Paul & Barnabas made bad choices or rushed their decisions: I think not!

Again we must trust the Holy Spirit and remember that He works all things together for the good of those called according to God's purpose.

- **As we move forward here at Church of the King we must keep these lessons in mind.**
- **We must strive for the proper balance for all of our experiences, trials and areas where we must obey.**

Church leadership is certainly one of those areas. Pastors Tuuri and Shaw put their trust in Theron and I to be the Elders here at Church of the King after much prayer and counsel. Pastor Tuuri still serves as our elder pro-tem to assist us in this work much as Paul and Barnabas looked over the churches they had planted. Dennis will have the opportunity to minister to us and to better evaluate our progress as he and Christine spend time with us at our family camp this year!

As we move forward there will be other men who will Lord-willing be appointed to positions of leadership here at Church of the King. We follow what we believe is the Biblical pattern here in Acts by having these men appointed by the elders as they are chosen by the congregation [explain our process]

How will we know who these men are?

They are to be those who sense the call of God on their lives but also those who are called...

- **Another one of those tensions we must live with!**

A man who is being led into Church leadership can neither stay quiet until someone notices them, nor stand up front and say "pick me, pick me!"

We must all be faithful to pray about leadership here at the church!

Those who feel the Lord might be calling them to a position of leadership or those who believe someone else is qualified should speak with Theron or myself about such things.

The Spirit of God is building the Church with redeemed sinners so this is often how things move forward.

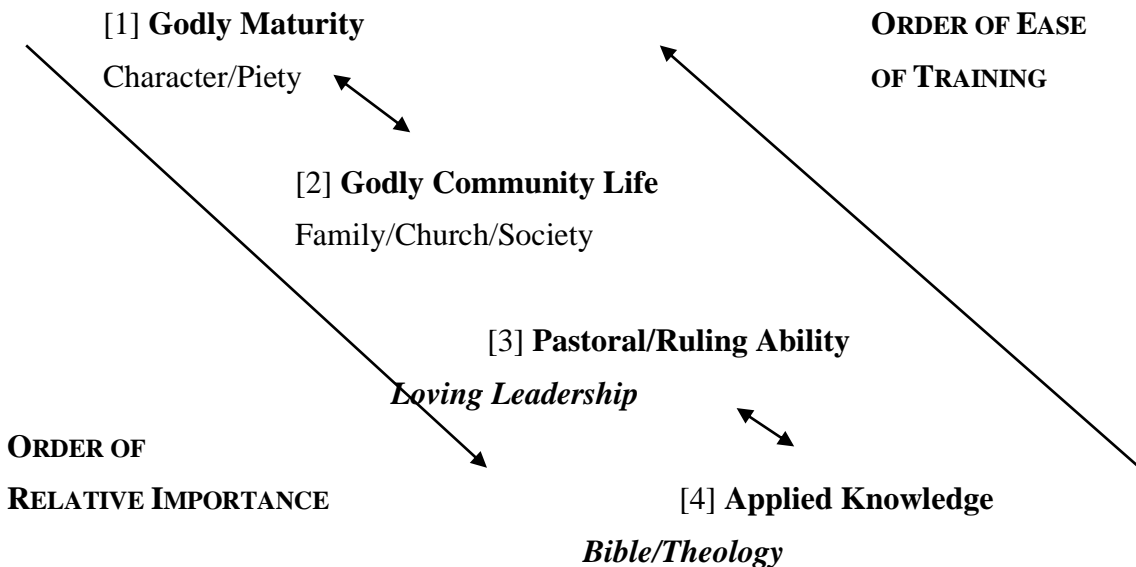
And finally, just a brief word and perhaps a bit of homework on how we seek to find and train good leaders here at Church of the King.

We have been blessed with much wisdom from those who have ministered to us from our sponsoring church, Reformation Covenant in Oregon City.

We have modeled our training manuals for both elders and deacons after their work and I have included excerpts from the elder book in the order of worship.

I would call you attention to the many verses that are quoted in this section as a good place to do some further study.

I also want to draw your attention to a very insightful and helpful chart near the bottom of the page. It shows the four areas that the pastoral epistles tell us to look for in men who would lead the church. Below is a chart designed to illustrate an order of priority for evaluation and training of a man.



It also shows two directions that run opposite to each other:

One is the ease of training or learning these qualifications and the other is the relative importance of each for the work of ministry. In other words what is the easiest to teach is of lesser importance or more importantly cannot stand on its own. Obviously we strive to have men who are fully qualified in all of these areas. But when we consider how Paul and Barnabas had to make their decisions and who these early churches would have had confidence in, it would certainly have been maturity and community life that would be needed most.

- Their ability to lead as an elder and even their knowledge of the Scriptures would have of necessity grown over time.

Our prayer since the beginning for Church of the King is that we would be faithful in establishing a church that would be strong and ready to serve our children and others God brings into our midst.

We have also prayed that our children would be prepared to continue the work of the church and take Church of the King on to even more maturity for their children and beyond. We want to stand against an age that puts little importance in the Church and sees most of our young people lost to the world.

By God's grace and faithful obedience to the guidance the Spirit gives we trust that such will be the case!

Communion Meditation: Acts 4:

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."