

Through Many Tribulations

Acts 14.1-28

The gospel regularly receives both a beautiful response and a brutal one.

"Victory through suffering is the contour of their ministry." Patrick Schreiner

"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." John 16:33

"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you." John 15:18-19

What do we do in order to faithfully live and serve in a culture that is hostile to Christianity?

The world has always been hostile to the gospel. This isn't a surprise to God. Remember: God strategically uses opposition for His kingdom purposes.

I. Gospel Clarity. Acts 14.1-7

Hostility to the gospel actually shows Paul that the gospel is what is needed. It reinforces the need for gospel clarity, fidelity, and simplicity.

"By our uncritical pursuit of relevance we have actually courted irrelevance; by our breathless chase after relevance without a matching commitment to faithfulness, we have become not only unfaithful but irrelevant; by our determined efforts to redefine ourselves in ways that are more compelling to the modern world than are faithful to Christ, we have lost not only our identity but our authority and our relevance. Our crying need is to be faithful as well as relevant." Os Guinness

"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. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. **So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord.**" Acts 14:1-3

"When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, and **there they continued to preach the gospel.**" Acts 14:5-7

"The expulsion from Antioch did not lead to a change of policy or tactics for Paul and Barnabas. Success or failure does not shape the method of their ministry." Patrick Schreiner

Obligation: Opposition is just an indication of the deep need for the gospel.

"I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Romans 1:13-16

"Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. "2 Corinthians 4:1-2

"When ministering in a hostile context, it is tempting to hold back parts of God's gospel that we feel are difficult for people to believe. Perhaps in attempts to be sensitive to our hearers and their culture, we may distort or adjust the gospel and unwittingly deceive people. However, holding back truth or being vague regarding what God has made clear is not being sensitive—it is arrogant and unloving. Even under threat of suffering and death, we preach Christ crucified, for the Lamb of God is worthy to receive the reward of His suffering (Rev. 5:12). God has ordained the message that lost people need to hear, and people in a culture that is hostile to the gospel are no exception." Dave Furman

II. Genuine Humility - Acts 14.8-18

We cannot choose popularity over gospel clarity. It would be better to be persecuted than to be wrongly praised.

"But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, **they tore their garments** and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, '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." Acts 14:14-16

"We distort the gospel when we want to be the hero. We are servants of the King. He alone is the hero, the protagonist in the good news storyline. The extraordinary power of God resides in weak vessels. Jesus did not come like a lion, with power and strength; he came as a lamb, with meekness and humility. You don't have to be extraordinary. You are a clay pot that is ordinary, easily broken, and common. God's power is what is remarkable. Your success resides in your weaknesses, not in your strengths." Scott Thomas

"But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies." 2 Corinthians 4:7-10

Gospel humility is designed to make it clear that God alone saves:

- clarity about ourselves - We can't save anyone.
- clarity about their lives - Your idols can't save you.
- clarity about the urgency - God's offer of grace is a limited time offer. There is urgency to the message.

III. Christian Maturity - Acts 14:19-23

Opposition to the gospel reveals both a need and an opportunity for discipling Christians towards maturity.

"When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 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." Acts 14:21-22

Disciple-making Requires:

- Modeling Faithfulness

- Maturing Through Trials
- Mobilizing for Ministry

“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.” (Acts 14:23)

IV. Restorative Community - Acts 14.24-28

Ministry in a hostile environment always reveals our need for fresh restorative grace from God through His people. Mature Christians are believers who know their limitations and their need for the ministry of others in their lives.

"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. And they remained no little time with the disciples." Acts 14:27-28

◆ Group Study Questions – Acts 14:1–28 | “Faithful in a Hostile Culture”

I. Gospel Clarity (Acts 14:1–7)

Theme: The need for bold and faithful proclamation in the face of opposition

- 1. Why does opposition to the gospel reinforce the need for clarity rather than silence or compromise?**
→ How do we typically respond when we feel rejected for our faith?
- 2. Read Romans 1:13–16.** What does it mean to be “under obligation” to share the gospel?
→ What might that look like in your current environment?
- 3. Os Guinness says:**

“By our uncritical pursuit of relevance we have actually courted irrelevance...”

→ How can the church remain both *faithful* and *relevant* without compromising the gospel?

4. Have you ever felt tempted to “soften” or “adjust” the gospel message for a hostile audience?
→ What helps you stay faithful in those moments?
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II. Gospel Humility (Acts 14:8–18)

Theme: We are not the hero—God is

5. Paul and Barnabas refused to accept worship and redirected glory to God.
→ In what subtle ways can we sometimes seek credit or “be the hero” in ministry?
6. **Read 2 Corinthians 4:7–10.** What does it mean to be a “jar of clay”?
→ How can our weakness actually strengthen our witness?
7. Scott Thomas said:

“Jesus did not come like a lion, with power and strength; he came as a lamb, with meekness and humility.”

→ How can we follow Christ’s example in how we speak and serve others?

8. What idols (whether cultural or personal) do people often trust instead of Jesus?
→ How can we speak to those idols in gospel conversations?
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III. Christian Maturity (Acts 14:19–23)

Theme: Perseverance, discipleship, and leadership development through trials

9. In verse 22, Paul tells new believers that “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”
→ Why is it important to include suffering in our discipleship conversations?
10. How does Christian maturity differ from simply “knowing more about the Bible”?
11. What are some specific ways we can “strengthen the souls” of others like Paul and Barnabas did?
→ What has been most strengthening to your own soul in hard seasons?
12. What does the appointment of elders (v. 23) tell us about building up local churches in hard places?

IV. Restorative Community (Acts 14:24–28)

Theme: We need each other—especially in gospel ministry

13. After facing danger and persecution, Paul and Barnabas return to community.
→ Why is community essential for long-term faithfulness in ministry?
14. In your own life, where do you go for rest and restoration when you're worn out by spiritual battles?
15. What role can your group (or church) play in being a restorative community for each other and others on the frontlines of ministry?



Wrap-Up Discussion

16. Based on this lesson, what's one practical step you feel led to take this week:
 - In gospel clarity?
 - In gospel humility?
 - In pursuing Christian maturity?
 - In investing in gospel community?