

**Introduction:**

Good Morning!

Today we're going to talk about something that every disciple eventually has to learn how to handle > not suffering in general, not every hardship in life, but the opposition that comes because we follow Jesus.

Acts 14 is not a feel-good passage. It's not a church-growth passage. It's a disciple-making passage.

It teaches us how to become the kind of disciples who are not easily shaken (unfazed) when the stones come.

**ME:**

- I don't mean just bad situations or hard things in general; I am talking about **opposition that comes because our faith becomes visible.**
- Most of us will never face literal stones for our faith.

But many of us know what it feels like to be:

- talked about instead of talked to
- misunderstood rather than clarified
- labeled rather than known
- treated differently once our faith becomes visible
- The stones most of us face today don't come from the ground.  
They come through words, assumptions, and attitudes.
- They show up as:

- being reduced to a stereotype
- having motives questioned
- being dismissed before being heard
- The stones most of us face aren't meant to end our faith. They're meant to pressure it into shrinking.
- Some of them land publicly. Some land quietly, but repeatedly.

Acts 14 reminds me that discipleship has always included moments when following Jesus stops being neutral and starts drawing resistance.

## WE:

- This is where it gets complicated for many of us.
- Some Christians experience pushback because they're **being faithful** to Jesus. However, some experience pushback because they are **being unloving or aggressive**, and some **experience no pushback** at all, because their faith never really shows up in their relationships or conversations.
- We have to be self aware enough to ask the Spirit to reveal to us:
  - Am I being opposed because of Christ? Or...
  - Is it because I am representing him poorly
  - Am I being bold, or pushy and judgemental?
  - Am I being faithful, or being silent to stay comfortable?
- We struggle to know how to be...
  - bold without being abrasive
  - gentle without being passive
  - clear without being combative

- Not every stone thrown at a Christian is persecution.

**But following Jesus means resistance will come.**

- Today's passage doesn't just tell us that stones will come, but it gives us insight on how to handle them.
- A shift is coming for Paul. Ministry is becoming very difficult for him, and the upcoming events in the book of Acts are formational for him
- And we can learn from these events too, how to move from being a fragile disciple, to an unfazed disciple.

**GOD:**

#### **ACTS Chapter 14:1-14**

- After leaving Antioch, they continue on to Iconium and preach there. They hear about a plot to stone them, so they move on preaching the gospel. They come to a small city called Lystra. There things get a little weird for Paul & Barnabas
- Some background: There is an 8<sup>th</sup> century poet named Ovis, who wrote a myth about Zeus and Hermes coming in disguise to the area of Lystra. In the story, Zeus and Hermes are rejected by 1000 homes until welcomed by a poor elderly couple. They reveal themselves, destroy everyone in the area with a flood and reward the couple.
- This story was likely well known and is likely why the people respond as intensely as they do.
- Lets read what happens together: Acts 14 vers 8

<sup>1</sup>8Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. <sup>9</sup>He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, <sup>10</sup>said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking. <sup>11</sup>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!” 12Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 13And 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. 14But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments 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. 16In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. 17Yet 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.” 18Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

- So that’s super awkward. They see a response from the people, but it’s entirely the wrong response. This is where something dark happens. Keep reading

19But 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. 20But 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. 21When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22strengthening 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. 23And 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..

**Lets look at the opposition they faced, and see what insight we can gain from it.**

**Stone 1: Being a faithful witness often brings resistance**

Paul and Barnabas preach the gospel.

Many believe.

And almost immediately, division follows.

Which feels odd, because we preach love: Love God and Love your neighbor as you love yourself.

The gospel doesn't land in neutral space. (complicated!)

Faithful preaching produces fruit, but it also produces friction.

What stands out to me is how Paul and Barnabas respond.

- They don't panic.
- They don't provoke unnecessarily.
- They stay while the work is fruitful.
- They leave when violence becomes imminent.

Faithfulness includes courage, but it also includes discernment.

## **Stone 2: opposition often comes through distortion**

Later, Jews come from Antioch and Iconium.

They don't stumble into Lystra by accident.

They come intentionally.

- **(Aside)**

Who are these people?

In Acts 14, this opposition comes from people outside the faith who reject the gospel entirely.

In Acts 15, the conflict comes from inside the church, from believers confused about grace and the law.

This passage is about enduring opposition from outside the faith.

We'll talk about disagreement inside the church next week.

But the wisdom of how to handle stones applies in both places.

These Jews here:

They persuade the crowds.

They distort the message.

They turn public opinion.

They twist the message of the Gospel away from a message of God's great love for humanity, and they misrepresent it and twist it.

Here is a reality:

**Not all opposition is honest disagreement. Some of it is deliberate distortion.**

When truth threatens power, distortion becomes a strategy.

Lies often travel farther and faster than clarification.

**Stone 3: Perseverance is vital to form mature discipleship (trust)**

Paul survives the stoning. And then he does something remarkable.

He goes back.

Not to chase pain. But to strengthen disciples

He encourages them and he tells them the truth that:

"Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

He doesn't promise ease and prosperity, instead he normalizes suffering.

This is the doctrine of Union with Christ (We share in his sufferings to share in his glory)

The tribulations are a result of two kingdoms colliding:

- God's kingdom is about humility, love, self-sacrifice
- Kingdom of the world is about power, pride, self-preservation

As followers of Jesus move through the enemy territory, it creates conflict. The friction is the tribulation that we will for sure experience.

Paul also cares for them and appoints leaders.

He entrusts the church to God.

Perseverance here isn't about proving how tough you are, or chasing hardship or avoiding them.

It's about remaining faithful when the hardships come. (**trust**)

**YOU:**

So what does this mean for us as disciples?

- First, we need to discern where the stones are coming from.
  - Is this resistance about Christ?
  - Or about my tone, posture, or approach?
- Faithfulness can offend.

But unkindness **always damages** our witness.

- Suffering for Christ is not the same thing as suffering for being careless with truth or love.

- Second, we need to reject the false choices we often feel forced into.

We are not choosing between:

- truth or grace
- boldness or love
- -- Have you ever met a 'I just tell it like it is' person?
- Jesus never chose between grace and truth.

He held them together, and we should too.

- Finally, we should ask the honest question: **Is my faith visible enough to ever draw resistance?**
- The call isn't to go looking for a fight or conflict
  - It's to stop hiding faith behind comfort or fear
- Opposition is not the goal.  
Comfort is not the measure.  
Faithfulness is the calling.

That means:

- staying rooted in community
- letting Scripture shape our responses
- refusing to let stones harden our hearts or silence our witness

**WE:**

I want us to be a church that:

- doesn't romanticize opposition
- doesn't collapse under criticism

- doesn't distort the gospel to avoid discomfort
- doesn't throw stones at other people

I want us to be a people who are:

- clear without being cruel
- united without being uniform
- courageous without being combative
- **The goal of discipleship isn't to avoid stones or throw them back.  
It's to look like Jesus when the pressure comes.**

### **Gospel Call:**

Jesus was misrepresented.

He was slandered.

He was falsely accused.

And He endured it without retaliation.

He absorbed the ultimate stones so that we could be forgiven,  
formed, and sent as faithful disciples.

If you've been hiding from Jesus to avoid the cost, He invites you to trust Him.

If you've never truly followed Him, today is the day. You are here for a reason!

And for all of us, Jesus never promised a path without resistance, but He did promise His presence in the middle of it.

When the stones come, we are not alone, and we are not abandoned.

In Christ, we are being formed into disciples who can stand firm without growing bitter, who can speak truth with love, and who can trust God even when faith becomes costly.

The invitation today is simply this: to place our lives again in the hands of Jesus and to follow Him faithfully, whatever the response may be.

**Let's pray.**

Father, we thank You that You are forming us into disciples who can follow You faithfully when opposition comes. You know the stones we face > the pressure, the misunderstanding, the temptation to grow silent or to grow harsh. Give us wisdom to discern, courage to stand firm, and hearts shaped by the love of Christ. Teach us to endure faithfully without losing compassion, to speak truth without abandoning grace, and to trust You when faith becomes costly. Shape us into a people who persevere with wisdom, courage, and love, so that in every season we reflect Jesus well. We pray this in His name. Amen.

**Benediction**

1 Corinthians 15:58

“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”