

4/24/16

Acts 14:21-28

Serious About Mission

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.

(Pastor Prays)

Part of the issue in our country today comes from the simple fact that so many professing Christians are genuinely not serious about Jesus Christ. There's no real burden for holiness, no longing for growth, no desire to articulate the Gospel, to know the Bible or to really live for Christ. So what you end up having is empty people attending dying churches with meaningless worship and no real Gospel change, because, the truth is, there is no way you can be serious about Jesus and not be burdened with the desire to serve Him and love Him and to expand the kingdom of God. At the core of the heart for mission is a love for Christ and a serious driving devotion to live your life for Christ.

There is no casual Christianity. There's only Christianity. And at Hickory Grove we are striving to be serious about Christ and His mission. We take as our model the New Testament church as described in Acts and, more specifically, two men we've been watching for some time: Paul & Barnabas. By the time you join them near the end of Chapter 14, Barnabas has been mistaken for Zeus and in v. 19, Paul has been stoned nearly to death and dragged out of town for dead. These guys have been through it but

like Gideon, they were exhausted – yet pursuing. They were chasing a mission. They were fulfilling a mandate. They were making their days count for eternity.

That's what I want to be about. That's what Hickory Grove must be about and that's what Plus One Mission Challenge is about. And honestly, it's what being a Christian is about: Being serious about Jesus. The truth is...

When you are serious about Jesus, you are serious about mission

Here is what I mean. At Hickory Grove...

We Are Serious About Going to the Hard Places

We don't have any desire to do "feel good" missions or mission trips that are little more than tourism. We get that model from Paul and Barnabas in the text. They've traveled to Lystra in v. 8, a pagan town that doesn't grasp the message, and by v. 19 they've quit worshipping Paul and try to kill him.

Now notice in v. 20-21, after they tried to kill Paul, Paul and Barnabas went back to Lystra. We've got a mission pastor and wife, Casey and Amber Norkett, who risked their lives every day in Libya to reach Muslims. Our church, through the International Mission Board, has strategic partnerships with sold-out missionaries in East Asia, Central Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. Many of those on the field came out of this church. Not only that, we are constantly commissioning mission teams to go to these hard places.

This year we went to 16 different mission points and 118 of our ordinary members went on mission trips, many of you for the first time. Why? Because for normal Christians, being serious about Jesus means being serious about mission. At Hickory Grove, whether it's in the U.S. or around the world, we go into hard places doing spiritual battle because Satan hates Gospel mission. We are serious about going to the hard places.

We Are Serious About Planting Strong Churches

That's not some innovative new way to do missions. Missions has always been from the church. There is no better mission agency than a rightly-ordered church, planned by God the Father, purchased by God the Son and Powered by God the Spirit.

In the text Paul and Barnabas are planting churches. In fact, when you read v. 21-23, you see that their main focus was planting the church, because out of the church comes the Gospel mission. Let's read v. 21-23. *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.*

You read that and see they weren't just planting *churches*, they were planting *strong churches* and doing it in hard places. Part of our mission strategy is to work with our own North American Mission Board and help plant churches in some of the most unreached cities in North America. We already are partnered with a church in Toronto – a city with 6 million people and only 3% claim to be Christian. We are also partnered with a church we helped plant in Pittsburgh – a city of 2.5 million and 7% claim Christ. In the days ahead, we are going to plant a church in Boston and even ask some of you to pray about going and living there. Boston is a burned-over city. Once a bastion of American Protestantism, it's now shrouded in darkness. The fourth place we will partner with is Washington, D.C. We have already worked with a church planter there and will continue to develop these Gospel partnerships.

The four cities I've just mentioned (Toronto, Pittsburgh, Boston, Washington) have been identified as four of the most unchurched and lost cities in the U.S. We want to be a part of a Gospel movement in these cities, but it takes people and resources and that's what +1 is all about: you seeing the need and responding with action because at Hickory Grove we want to be serious about planting strong churches.

I've sort of started with international missions and then mentioned church planting in North America. What about here?

We Are Serious About Servant Evangelism

Notice what Paul and Barnabas are doing in v. 22. They've been witnessing and now you see them serving. Notice the words in v. 22, "Strengthening the souls and encouraging them to continue in the faith." Strengthening and coming alongside, helping people not to give up, to continue to move forward to Christ. The word — encourage— to come alongside and help and to do so for the Gospel.

The various ministries that emerge out of Hickory Grove are designed to be Gospel-focused and help-oriented. In other words, we don't want to just help people and not verbally share Christ with them. On the other hand, we don't want to just *talk* and not *act*. So our Gospel ministries are Gospel-centered and help-oriented.

For example, our food pantry located at the Latin Campus, fed more than 300 families in the community this year. The Clothes Closet is a ministry driven by volunteers and they had more than 2,500 families visit this year. In the last several months, 5 people have come to Christ through the Clothes Closet ministry. Hearts and Hammers, manned by volunteers, were involved in 209 projects including wheelchair ramps, tree removal, wiring repairs and sharing the Gospel during multiple trips for disaster relief. Our Car Care ministry provides routine car maintenance for widows and single women. Furthermore, we are a part of ministries like *Whisper of Hope*, *Fellowship of Christian Athletes*, *Appalachia* (serving the poorest of the poor), *Lois Lodge* (a ministry for unwed mothers). And time doesn't permit me to elaborate on the women's missions or *Operation Charlotte* (where almost 300 of our students and leaders spend time out in the community serving in the name of Christ.) Even our school football team and others I've failed to mention.

My point is to say that we are serious about servant evangelism. And that's what +1 Mission Challenge is about: getting you to move off center for the cause of the Gospel through giving 1% of your income directly to the missions of Hickory Grove because we are not only serious about servant evangelism...

We Are Serious About Real Sacrifice

What I mean is that following Jesus puts you in the crosshairs of a world that hates the Gospel.

Paul indicates that to the churches in the hard places in v. 21-22. *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. "Many tribulations," that is difficulty.*

The way to the cross means a radical reorienting of what you deem as most important, and this morning I am asking you to think differently than you have in the past.

If you are an unbeliever, think differently about Christ. If you are uninvolved, think differently about mission. Get committed and think differently about giving. I'm asking you to take Jesus seriously.

When you are serious about Jesus, you are serious about mission.

(Pastor prays)