

"Persistence"
Acts 14:1-7
(Preached at Trinity, June 21, 2006)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. We've been following Paul and Barnabas as they were sent forth on a missionary journey by the church of Antioch.
 - A. After arriving at Seleucia on the island of Cyprus Paul and Barnabas preached the Gospel of Christ. From Seleucia they proceeded to Paphos on the southwest side of Cyprus. From there they sailed nearly 200 miles across the Mediterranean Sea to Perga. From there they continued on to the mountainous region of Antioch in Pisidia.
 - B. The Jews reacted so violently against the Gospel that they expelled them from their coasts.
Acts 13:50 – "But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts."
 - C. Shaking the dust from their feet, Paul and Barnabas left Antioch in Pisidia and continued on to Iconium where they once again entered into a synagogue and began to preach the Gospel of Christ.
Again, some believed while others despised the Gospel. The fury against the Gospel became so intense that finally Paul and Barnabas had to flee the city.
 - D. They then entered into a region known as Lycaonia where they entered into two different cities, Lystra and Derbe.
2. In each of these cities Paul and Barnabas also faced severe opposition.
 - A. The Gospel is very divisive. It separates the sheep from the goats.
Matthew 10:34-36 – "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. ³⁶ And a man's foes *shall be* they of his own household."
The word for "variance" is διχάζω - to cut into two parts, cleave asunder, sever
There has been a great division made between the Christian and the world.
 - B. Although those in Christ have found the peace that passeth all understanding we have also found ourselves at enmity with the world.
John 16:33 – "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

Acts 14:21-22 – “And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, Confirming the souls of the disciples, *and* exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.”

- C. The coming of Christ into the world divided the world in two – Those who love darkness and those who love light.
Ephesians 5:8 – “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now *are ye* light in the Lord: walk as children of light:”
3. The Gospel always creates opposition. The truth is most people will reject the Gospel.
- A. Paul and Barnabas experienced this at Paphos:
Acts 13:8 – “But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.”
- B. They experienced it at Antioch in Pisidia:
Acts 13:50 – “But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts.”
- C. They experienced it at Iconium
Acts 14:2 – “But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.”
4. Obstacles often cause men to give up. Human beings are easily discouraged. No one likes rejection. No one likes difficulty.
 Luther: “It is an easy matter for a man to do good once or twice; but to continue, and not to be discouraged through the ingratitude and perverseness of those to whom he hath done good, that is very hard.”
5. We cannot afford to give up on something as important as the Gospel.
 How did Paul and Barnabas react to such obstacles?
Acts 14:3 – “Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.”
6. Calvin: “However harshly they were received in one place, they do not give up, for they consider that they had been called by the Lord to exercise their ministry throughout the world, and specifically in face of the opposition of Satan. We see, therefore, that they came, not only prepared to teach, but armed for the struggle, going on undaunted to proclaim the Gospel in the midst of conflict.”
7. Let me give you some reasons why we must exercise great persistence for the sake of the Gospel.
- I. Because we have been entrusted with the Gospel
- A. Jesus paid a great price for the salvation of His people
1. Every generation of believers are responsible to carry the message of Christ to their generation of unbelievers
 2. Jesus declared all believers to be the light of the world
Matthew 5:14-16 – “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵ Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. ¹⁶ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

3. Not all are called to a public preaching ministry but every believer represents Christ upon this earth.
- B. God demands that we press on in spite of opposition
1. We need to remember that every obstacle, every hardship has been ordained of God. He is sovereign.
 2. It is God's plan that opposition accompany His work
 - a. Moses faced great opposition
 - b. The prophets faced great opposition – don't forget Elijah's problem after his victory over the prophets of Baal.
1 Kings 19:1-2 – “And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. ² Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do *to me*, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time.”
 - c. New Testament saints face great opposition
We must press on with persistence and perseverance
- II. Because of the value of men's souls
- A. God places value upon human beings
1. We live in a culture that devalues human beings
 - a. We are taught that abortion is permissible because the baby is just tissue
 - b. We are desensitized to the taking of human life through movies, video games, television
 - c. Animal rights advocates tell us that animals are just as important as human beings. We need to be clear that animals are here to serve man. We are permitted to eat them, wear them, and extract labor from them.
 2. God created man in His image
 3. It was for human beings that God sent forth His Son. Christ took upon Himself the nature of a man.
- B. Christ described the value of the human soul
Matthew 16:26 – “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”
1. God commands every man to turn from his wickedness.
 2. Jesus is the only hope of this world – we must bring them this good news
- C. Sin has left human beings dead and blind
1. Lost men do not see their true peril
 - a. They will not tremble for themselves
 - b. They will not weep for themselves
 2. We must continue with persistence – in spite of the opposition
 “Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord”
- III. Because they can oppose us but they cannot defeat us
- A. Paul saw his Gospel work as a war
1. Excellent soldiers do not cease fighting until the battle is won
 2. There must be no surrender in this war

3. He made a bold statement at the end of his life:
2 Timothy 4:7 – “I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith:”

- B. We must understand that we *cannot* be defeated
Romans 8:35-37 – “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. ³⁷ Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.”
Isaiah 54:17 – “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue *that* shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This *is* the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness *is* of me, saith the LORD.”
Jeremiah 1:19 – “And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I *am* with thee, saith the LORD, to deliver thee.”
 1. We are expected to press on in spite of every hardship or opposition
 2. They can only touch our body, they cannot touch our soul. They cannot separate us from our King

IV. Because we are guaranteed success

- A. God is saving His elect
 1. Jesus taught this clearly
John 6:37 – “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”
 2. God will not allow a single one of the elect to perish
2 Peter 3:9 – “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”
- B. We *will* be successful in our work
 1. The Gospel is accomplishing its perfect work
2 Corinthians 2:16 – “To the one *we are* the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life.”
 2. This isn’t just a human work. It is God who is working effectually in the Gospel. He is accomplishing His perfect work. Nothing is too hard for Him.
Jeremiah 32:27 – “Behold, I *am* the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?”
 3. We must continue in persistence
Galatians 6:9 – “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”

V. Because our reward is great

- A. There is a reward to be found in Christ
 1. There is an inner peace and confidence in Christ
 2. There is a satisfaction in knowing we are well-pleasing to Christ
 Christ is the motive in all that we do. Our reward is Christ. To honor Him is the highest reward.

- B. The Bible speaks much of the reward of the faithful
- 2 Timothy 4:7-8** – “I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: ⁸ Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”
- Colossians 3:23-24** – “And whatsoever ye do, do *it* heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; ²⁴ Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.”
- 2 Corinthians 4:17-18** – “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.”
1. Paul considered it a great reward to espouse men to Christ – to see God’s glorious salvation
 2. His converts *were* his reward
- 1 Thessalonians 2:19** – “For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Are* not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?”

Conclusion:

1. Christians are to press on in this world with great persistence. We must carry the Gospel to the lost. We must persist in spite of opposition, in spite of busy schedule, in spite of every difficulty. We are to seize every opportunity. We are to use every Biblical means. This is why we keep tracts in the back of the church and encourage all to persist in this form of evangelism.
2. Persistence, however, is not without limits.
 - A. We are to continue boldly with great persistence even in the face of opposition.
 - B. We are to patiently bear with those who do not understand. It may take many years for our work to bear fruit. William Carey preached in India for seven years before he saw the first convert.
3. Never are we to be harsh, heavy-handed, manipulative – There comes a time when we have to walk away.

There are also times in extreme cases when we have to walk away because of personal safety.

Acts 14:5-6 – “And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use *them* despitefully, and to stone them, ⁶ They were ware of *it*, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about:”

 - A. Notice, however, it wasn’t the work that was abandoned, just these particular people

Acts 14:6-7 – “(they) fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: ⁷ And there they preached the gospel.”

- B. We saw the same thing in the previous chapter.
Acts 13:50-51 – “But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. ⁵¹ But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium.”
- C. This takes great wisdom – when to continue working with a person or people, and when to walk away. We need to trust much in the leadership of Christ.
Matthew 10:23 – “But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.”
4. Sometimes we give up far too easily when we face the least opposition. May God grant us great persistence in the work of the Gospel.