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“What Tough Times Teach Us”

Acts 14:8-22

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If you are going through a difficult time, you are not alone. Plenty of people suffer in this life, but for the Christian, there are things we can learn through adversity. Acts 14:22 says, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” Pastor Gary unpacks this verse and teaches four things that we can learn through tough times.

1. [Acts 14:8-22](#) - *“And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother’s womb, who had never walked. This man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, ‘Stand up straight on your feet!’ And he leaped and walked. Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, ‘The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!’ And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out and saying, ‘Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.’ And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them. Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the*

souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.'"

2. Paul and Barnabas in Lystra

- a. Part of Paul's first missionary tour, between AD 46 and 48
- b. While there, Paul healed a man crippled in both feet
- c. Because of the miracle, the crowd thought Paul and Barnabas were the Greek gods Hermes and Zeus
 - i. According to local myth, Hermes and Zeus visited Lystra many years before, went unrecognized, and were shown no hospitality by anyone except one elderly couple
 - ii. As a result of their mistreatment, the gods destroyed the city with a flood, saving only the elderly couple and turning their home into the temple of Zeus
 - iii. When the residents saw Paul perform a miracle, they immediately assumed Hermes and Zeus had returned and didn't want to make the same mistake supposedly made by the residents of Lystra years before
 - iv. Paul unsuccessfully argued that he and Barnabas were only men, only there to point them to the one true God
- d. Some Jews that were hostile toward Christianity then stirred up the crowd against Paul and Barnabas, and the crowd turned against them, ultimately stoning Paul
- e. It is likely that Paul was killed
 - i. In 2 Corinthians 12 Paul described an experience of being taken up to heaven
 1. Most scholars believe that passage is in reference to Paul's experience being stoned in Lystra
 - ii. [Acts 14:20](#) states that the disciples "*gathered around him,*" so the disciples may have laid hands on Paul and prayed, and God may have revived him
- f. Paul and Barnabas left Lystra but soon returned, where Paul exhorted the disciples
 - i. [Acts 14:22b](#) - "*We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.*"
 - ii. [Acts 14:22b](#) - "*We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.*" (1984 NIV)
 - iii. His desire for strengthening Believers was greater than his own fear of death

3. What did Paul mean when he said, "*We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God*"?

- a. Paul was not implying that hard work and suffering are a means to get to heaven

- i. The suffering that opened heaven for us was Jesus' death on the cross; access to heaven is through faith in Jesus
 - b. There is a difference between the "kingdom of God" and the "kingdom of heaven"—the first is a designation; the second is a destination
 - i. **Luke 17:20b-21** – *"The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."*
 - c. When you submit to His kingdom, you will encounter and experience some measure of trial, tribulation, or suffering
 - i. **1 Peter 4:12-13** – *"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."* (1984 NIV)
 - ii. **2 Timothy 3:12** – *"Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."*
 - iii. **John 16:33** – *"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."*
 - d. Paul understood what it meant to suffer
 - i. **2 Corinthians 11:23-28** – *"I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches."* (1984 NIV)
 - e. The Christian life is not a life of ease; there will be some degree of suffering and trials
 - i. For Believers, this life is as bad as it gets; for unbelievers, this life is as good as it gets

4. What tough times teach us

- a. Patience
 - i. **James 1:2-3** – *"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience."*
- b. Perseverance
 - i. **Romans 5:3-5** – *"And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."*
 - ii. **James 1:12** – *"Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."*
- c. Perspective
 - i. **Romans 8:18** – *"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."* (1984 NIV)
- d. Presence of God

- i. [Hebrews 13:5b](#) - *"I will never leave you nor forsake you."*
 - ii. [Matthew 28:20b](#) - *"Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*
 - iii. [Isaiah 41:10](#) - *"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."*
5. Oaks of righteousness
- a. The Southern Live Oak Tree is the hardest wood in North America and was at one time used to make ships
 - b. The trees become strong through resistance to the winds that come off the ocean
 - i. [Isaiah 61:2-3](#) - *"To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor."* (1984 NIV)

Discussion Questions

1. Read [Acts 14:8-22](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. When Paul stated, *"We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God,"* was he implying that we must work our way to heaven? Why or why not? (See #3a above)
3. Read [Luke 17:20b-21](#). To what kingdom was Paul referring? What is the significance of this "designation" in the life of the Believer? (See #3b above)
4. Read [1 Peter 4:12-13](#), [2 Timothy 3:12](#), and [John 16:33](#). How do we know that suffering is part of the Christian life? (See #3c above)
5. Read [2 Corinthians 11:23-28](#). How do we know that Paul was qualified to speak on suffering? (See #3d above)
6. Read [James 1:2-3](#) and [Romans 5:3-5](#). Discuss a time when a difficult circumstance helped you develop patience and perseverance. (See #4a & 4b above)
7. Read [Romans 8:18](#). Has a challenging situation ever caused you to shift your perspective away from things that were not important? (See #4c above)
8. Read [Hebrews 13:5b](#), [Matthew 28:20b](#), and [Isaiah 41:10](#). What is God's promise to us during tough times? What are practical things we can do to better rely on God's presence? (See #4d above)
9. Read [Isaiah 61:2-3](#). What are some of God's promises that we can hold to when we're facing difficulty? (See #5b-i above)

10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)