

Signs and Wonders

by Paris Reidhead

The sermon emphasizes the importance of joy and faith in God amidst persecution, highlighting the transformative power of the Holy Spirit and the necessity of personal witness.

Duration: 34:34

Scripture: Acts 13:52 - 14:7

Topics: "Signs And Wonders"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the need for believers to prioritize their relationship with Christ and to become bold witnesses for Him. He encourages the audience to seek a miracle in their lives, where they can experience joy and confidence in their workplaces and daily interactions. The speaker challenges the audience to examine their commitment to sharing the gospel and setting 'wedges' in people's hearts through personal witness and gospel tracks. He highlights the importance of faithfully preaching the truth and emphasizes that signs and wonders can follow those who faithfully proclaim the gospel.

Transcript

Will you turn please to Acts chapter 14? I would like to read the last two verses of the 13th chapter and the first seven verses of the 14th chapter. It's a rather strange place to begin, perhaps the 50th verse is necessary to give the 51st, meaning it deserves. But the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women and the chief men of the city and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them out of their coasts.

But they shook off the dust of their feet against them and came unto Iconium, and the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost. And it came to pass in Iconium that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews. And so spake that a great multitude, both of the Jews and also of the Greeks, believed.

But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and made their minds evil-affected against the brethren. Long time, therefore, abode they, speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony under the word of his grace and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided, in part held with the Jews, in part with the apostles.

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, they were aware of it and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of

Lyconia, and under the region that lieth round about. And there they preached the gospel. What are you going to do with men like this? How can you hurt them? What can you do to them? Persecuted in one place, shaking the dust of their feet off against the persecutors as a testimony and a witness, and filled with joy.

What happens to us never hurts us. It's only what we do about it. You realize that.

You're aware of this. Nothing that happens to you hurts you. It's what you do about it.

If someone bruises you, your tendency is to feel sorry for yourself. Hard done by. My tendency the same.

I'm not speaking down as though I stood on some elevation other than where the race of Adam stands. We tend to feel sorry for ourselves and hardly done by and want to do something about it. Grace teaches us something else, however.

It teaches us that nothing can touch us but what God allows it. And if God allows it, he has a purpose in it. And his purpose is to make us like Christ because he's more concerned about our being like Christ than being successful in any way that the world would measure success.

And therefore, in his sovereignty, he has set himself to the end of taking the persecution and the opposition, the difficulty, and all the problems that come along with life, and turning them to our good and to his glory. Now, you only see this through the eye of faith. It's so easy for us to look at the water under our feet instead of the Lord that's standing on the water.

It's our natural tendency, in fact, is always to look at the difficulties and look at the problems. And it's only grace that can lift our eyes above the problems to see him who is above them, even the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul, Barnabas, have had a wonderful ministry, a rich ministry.

They've been rejected by the Jews, received by the Gentiles, persecuted by devout and honorable women and the chief men of the city. They fled. They shake the dust off their feet, get outside the city limits, and start a glory service.

And they're filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost. Why? Because the door closed? No, but because this meant another door was open. This meant that God had something new and fresh and wonderful for them.

You see, they had, Paul knew what he was talking about when he said we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. And so he's prepared now for what's ahead of him. Can you imagine what would have happened if, like Elijah, he had hunted for a juniper tree, had sat down beneath its boughs, snuggled up against its trunk, nestled in its needles, and said, my, my, here we've given up all to serve the Lord, and this is the way they treat us.

They would have been utterly useless to God. Doors would have closed. Their ministry would have been stopped, for they would have been backslidden.

Strange, isn't it, how that when Elijah said, oh Lord, I alone am left. Let me die. God took him at his word.

It's the last of his miracles. He had to give his cup to another, his robe to another, ministry to another. Don't ever pray that way.

Don't ever pray that way, because the Lord may just answer that prayer, and you'd be filled with such regret. Elijah was. Strange, isn't it, that Elijah said, give me a double portion of your spirit.

And there were twice as many miracles performed by Elijah than there had been by Elijah. But we never find Elijah doing that. How grateful I am that this testimony is here.

Everything they'd worked for God, everything they'd counted on seemingly disintegrated, driven out of town. Shame and disgrace, if you please. I can see the editorials in the local paper the next day.

These rabid fanatics have now been delivered, and the city is relieved of a scourge, and we're hoping that things will come back to normal. And so they're gone, and Paul and Barnabas are on their way, not into despair, not into defeat, but into delightful rejoicing, because they realize that he is with them. They're filled with joy.

Are you able by the grace of God to live above the circumstances and the difficulties because you know him and love him? I am confident that the only reason that they could be said that they were filled with joy, filled with the Holy Ghost, is because they were filled with joy. Had they had not realized that his hand was there, and in the dark hour of their need and their difficulty, praise God, anyway. Oh, how I'm grateful to the memory of dear Dr. Forrest, who ministered here to so many of you for so long.

And I would meet him and talk with him, and I remember one particular time in my life when things were quite difficult. And I would see him and he'd look at me and say, oh brother, let's just praise the Lord anyhow, on general principles. And I think this is exactly what Paul and Barnabas are doing.

They're praising the Lord anyhow, on general principles. They're not allowing their praise to be restricted to their circumstances. Now that's tremendously important, because since they have their eyes on the Lord Jesus, their hearts, their lips filled with praise, and their hearts filled with the Holy Ghost, they're usable.

And it came to pass in Iconium that they went both to gather into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake that a great multitude of Jews and also of the Greeks believed. They weren't looking back, they were looking up. Their eyes were fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ.

They weren't complaining about how difficult times were, they were rejoicing in how glorious he is, and they were preaching Christ. And they so spake, when I read this in preparation for this evening, I saw that word, they so spake. They could have spoken, but they might not have so spoken.

They might have said something because it was their duty to say something. But they so spoke. Here was victory that was being translated into testimony.

Oh, how difficult it is to have a verbal testimony unless one has a heart experience. And how easy it is to let something come into the heart. The words may come out, but they're not the same.

They so spoke. Here were two men that had been driven out of an area of ministry. They had every reason to believe that if where they were coming, there would be either a revival, riot or revival, and probably both, and that's the case.

And they're filled with delight that they've been called to serve such a wonderful Lord and have an opportunity to be persecuted in Iconium. Well, essentially that's what it is. It's what's happened.

It's become the rule. And so now they're preaching in the synagogue, so exalting Christ that a great multitude, both of Jews and of Greeks, believe. I think this ought to just cause your heart to recognize that your personal witness for the Lord Jesus Christ need not depend upon your circumstances.

I rather feel that we think that if all of you perhaps may sometimes feel, if I were just R. G. Letourneau and ran a big caterpillar or a big earth-moving tractor company, it would be so easy to witness for the Lord. But just being me, where I am in my office, misunderstood, not appreciated, what can I say? I kind of feel that all of us rather think it's easier to witness if we were just someone else. How grateful I am that these men didn't feel that way.

They didn't say that, oh, we failed, here we are so disappointed. No, they have a testimony and a witness, joy in spite of their circumstances, the power of the Lord because of the presence of the Holy Spirit and a great company brought to Christ. But always it's a savor of life to life and the savor of death to death.

Now there are some unbelieving Jews, some believing, and when there are those who believe, there are others who unbelieve, who do not believe. And these that have not believed or refused to believe have found that all of a sudden the world is too small for them and for Paul. Someone has to go, just as the Pharisees, finding that Christ had something they didn't have, either had to seek what he had or kill him.

And they chose to kill him. So these Jews that have heard what Paul had to say have decided, as I mentioned, that the world is too small. Someone has to go.

And they are now prepared to rid their community, at least, of these that have disturbed the peace of their little society, their little synagogue. The unbelieving Jews got together, shared their unbelief, shared their rejection of Christ, stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil-affected against Paul and Barnabas and this company that had come there. So what did they do? Did they in fright say, well, the last time we had this situation, it became impossible.

Persecution increased. This is a good time to check with the bus company and find when there's a trip south. Is this what they did? Never.

Not so at all. Long time, therefore, abode they. Isn't that wonderful? Isn't that marvelous? Here were men in the midst of difficulty, in the midst of problems, in the midst of an inhospitable community, with some who believed, but a great number of unbelieving Jews were constantly stirring up the Gentiles and causing their minds to be evil-affected, who are determined to stay and see the thing through.

Long time, therefore, abode they. Now, I have dwelt upon this because the theme tonight is signs and miracles, signs and wonders. But notice what you have so far.

Here you have praise in the midst of persecution, joy in the midst of sorrow, faithfulness in the midst of opposition. I would submit to you that this is a tremendous miracle, knowing my heart and something about yours, that here in the behavior, the demeanor, the conduct of Paul and Barnabas, you have probably God's primary miracle. To take a persecutor in the first place and change him into a preacher is a miracle of God's grace.

To take the vacillating, stammering, stuttering sons of Adam and change them into bold proclaimers of the message of Christ, this is a miracle. Miracles on every hand. This page that I've, what I've read so far, is with, to my heart, filled with signs and wonders.

Now, wouldn't you consider it a miracle of God's grace if tomorrow, when you went into that office where there have been problems, possibly, you could go in with joy instead of fear? I talked with someone today who said, as I anticipate going to work, I just feel tense and taut and twisted and warped, and I'm weary with nervous exhaustion before I get to my place of work because of all the pressure that's on me. Well, how wonderful it would be if tonight God could do something so relieving, so releasing, so strengthening in your heart, that you could know that tomorrow as you go into that office, there will be with you and in you the Lord Jesus Christ. I think that from verse 51 through verse 2, you have the miracle for which you, perhaps, are in greatest need.

That is, his presence, his joyous release, the release of his resurrection life, to give you a complete absence of fear of men's faces, intimidation by their opposition, frustration by their rejection, and by their persecution. Now, this is what he offers you. This is what he wants to be to you.

And it is thus that he is seeking to allow, to get you, to allow him to bring this much of his resurrection life. Now, if this can happen, the rest is easy. The easy part of this is in the verse 3. The hard part was when they left the city, and there they were driven out of the city, actually, and instead of sitting down feeling sorry for themselves, their hearts were filled with joy.

That's hard. That's difficult. Praise when you'd like to pout.

This is hard, because it's completely contrary to nature. And then to seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit, even when you know that his fullness is going to mean projection into problems, because he leads you to the place of witness, which involves personal opposition often. But this is wonderful.

Now I say, that's hard. The greatest problem isn't changing water into wine. It isn't making tissue that's disappeared come back again, or limbs that have been twisted straightened.

Why, you see, all matter sprang into being in a word. You know that. God created everything that is by a word.

He spoke, and worlds came into being. He spoke, and suns began to burn. He spoke, and constellations took their form.

He spoke, and all that is appeared. And he holds it together by the word of his power, and one time he will speak, and it will be dissolved with a fervent heat. Matter submits to him.

Wind seats. Waves be still. The wind ceases and hushes to whisper, and the wave becomes as calm as a pond.

The words of the living Christ, always affective nature. Water become wine. There is no problem.

Eyes open. Dead arise. You see, he's speaking to matter.

He's speaking to material. He's speaking to tissue. And this here is the creator of the master's voice.

But when he says to sinners, repent, they put their hands on their hips, and their jaw out, and set their teeth, and their glint comes into their eye, and they say, I won't repent, and they don't repent. And it's the only thing in God's creation that can say, I won't, to God, man. And God is not willing that any should perish.

And so, when you find that there's been a transformation of heart, and of life, and of nature, and of character, and of personality, this is where the miracle is required. Because he has to persuade us. He has to tenderly draw us.

He has to lovingly woo us to take the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior's Lord. He has to tenderly woo us to come to the place of union with him in the cross. He has to plead with us to be willing to receive the gift and the fullness of his Spirit.

Oh my. He speaks to an empty universe, and it's filled with stars. But he has to entreat me, I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies, a living sacrifice, your reasonable service.

Almighty God, supplicating man, that he will do the thing which is going to ensure blessing to man and glory to God. Oh no. This, the great miracle, has already taken place.

That these men are prepared to stay a long time in the city where there is direct continued opposition, speaking boldly in the Lord. Now having these problems solved, the problem of their own reaction to their circumstances, the problem of a future that's based upon difficulties in the past, the problem of adjustment to opposition, these inner personal problems met in the Lord Jesus Christ, now have given the foundation upon which God can build. They are there inhospitably received, despised, but speaking boldly in the Lord.

Now, because they're saying the thing that God wants said, God is released to honor what they're saying. The Lord gave testimony unto the word of his grace. He waited till they set the wedges, then he hit them.

Have you ever seen a log split? I understand they have a mechanical device for that. I would like to see how that works, because the only one I knew was the old log, Armstrong wedges, a little metal wedge, and a 10-pound maul. And when I was a boy on the farm, I used to have to split that, you swing that.

I'd swing it till I could hardly lift it. In fact, it was so heavy I could hardly get it down when I got it up in the air. That's how heavy it was.

And here I would be out there doing my best, putting a wedge in and hit it, and if you didn't hit it square, that wedge would go wing off and hit a tree, and if you weren't careful it could...because they would just sing off into the snow and bury themselves in the snow. There wasn't any good to pound the log. In other words, if you could have had a 20-pound maul and pounded the log, all you would have done was mar the bark.

You had to have the wedge set. There had to be the starting of the wedge. We had a little four-pound hammer we could handle easily.

We'd get that, we'd pound that in, get it started in the log, and then hit with gradually increasing blows until it began to open, then put another wedge further down in the split. And so would split a long log, getting it ready to cut it up for firewood. It was something like this.

Paul and Barnabas were there a long time setting a wedge, putting a truth here, hammering it in. Going down the log, setting a wedge. Going down the log, setting a wedge.

They put the truth. They preached the word. They declared the truth.

Now there was something for God to hit. Do you see? There was a reason for his signs and wonders. They had been faithful in setting the truth.

For instance, we say, oh God, gather in multitudes of souls in New York City, but have you been setting wedges in their hearts? Have you been giving out gospel tracts? Have you been giving personal witness? Have you been sharing the truth? Have you been setting the wedge? Let's suppose that tonight, right here in this service, God should touch his arm, and he's here, it wouldn't be difficult for him, and a great miracle could happen. What effect would it have? First place, there's no newspapers, they wouldn't know, couldn't get it on television or radio. It wouldn't even get outside on the street.

Do you know what I think we ought to do? Rather than being so concerned that we're not seeing the miracle happen, we ought to set wedges. We ought to drive the truth, sharpen it in prayer, hone it in love, and find hearts, and just take a little gentle hammer and start the wedge. God's going to hit it.

You get it started, God will hit it. Do you realize that Spurgeon was instrumental in a great in-gathering in England simply because the people took his sermons? They were printed on Monday. He usually got his notes and the writing and the coach from his home to the church, preach it, people sitting in front taking it down shorthand, put it in type, and they sold them on the streets for a hate name, printed them up in quantity, and they distributed them all over, all over that part of England.

In fact, they got into newspapers finally. Some of the businessmen paid and they published a sermon and a whole page in the newspaper. When, incidentally, a crockery company in sending some china to Sweden from the China's section of England used newspaper, they bought them from London, and do you know what they did? They got some of Spurgeon's sermons.

And a dear woman in Sweden ordered some china, and she was unpacking it, and she came to one of these pages, and she sat there and didn't unpack the rest of the box, and she began to read, and the grace of God, all she had was ceremonial religion, but the pure grace of God, that God in Christ saves sinners, so overwhelmed her, so thrilled her, so excited her, that she gathered together a group of people and read from the china. She could read English and she translated it into Swedish, and it wasn't long until she was going elsewhere reading this sermon, she wrote to England, got some more sermons, and a great move of God broke out. He was setting wedges.

Are we setting wedges? Are we setting the truth? Are we driving it in? Now this is what they did. A long time, bold day, speaking boldly in the Lord. I want you to see that.

I want you to see that God is a great economist, and he did not give them miracles back there when they spoke into the synagogue. They didn't need them. It wasn't in his purpose.

The word was sufficient. He did not give them these signs and wonders until it was appropriate to the thing that he was doing. It isn't that God couldn't have performed some miracle and have kept the people in the city where he was from persecuting them.

He could have. Perhaps it had been obviously to say, oh Lord, don't let them drive us out of town. Paul didn't do that.

He said, which way, Lord? And so he sort of got them to steer a little while they drove him out. So he was headed in the town the Lord wanted him to go. Because when he got there, there was a ministry.

A long time they abode, speaking boldly, which gave, and the Lord gave testimony under the word of his grace and granted. Now this is the key word. God granted signs and wonders.

I see no problem with signs and wonders. I've happened to have been witnessed to sufficient along the way so that my heart hasn't any trouble there. I believe that signs and wonders are, in the purpose of God, as demonstrably real today as they were.

But you know where the difficulty is? To get people that aren't going to look at the circumstances, going to look at the Lord, and in the midst of persecution rejoice in him. That are going to take this opportunity as from him, and in the midst of this opportunity use it. Exploit everything that's available to them.

And then even in the midst of opposition, in the midst of rejection, go on boldly proclaiming the word of his grace, confident that when God's time comes, so easy for him to stretch forth his hand. This to me is so wonderfully, wonderfully clear. Signs and wonders, yes.

But they are to follow. They are to be the, they are to befall upon the wedge of truth rather than to take the place of it. And if you say, Oh God give us signs and wonders, is there something set that he can hit? Is there a wedge there or will it just be powdering the log, driving the bark into powder, but not splitting the log? They were there proclaiming the word, sowing the seed.

God came and instantly watered it, caused it to spring and to grow to full ear. This is what was done with a sign and wonder. It bypassed the normal process and brought it into almost instantaneous fruition.

But even there, we say today that the great need in the church is for the miracles of God to be manifest again. What happened? The multitude of the city was divided, part held with the Jews and part with the apostles. And we must remember that the greater is the demonstration of God's power, the more fierce is going to be the rejection of those who have light and great light and brilliant light which they refuse to walk in.

The reason the multitude called out crucify him with Christ was because the brilliant light of his presence in his ministry, the reason they just drove Paul out of town, was because his was not as bright as that of our Lord. The brighter that becomes the light, the more fierce becomes the opposition. And so we find the multitude of the city, not just a few Jews, but the multitude of the city is divided, part held with the Jews and part with the apostles.

So there's an assault made, both of the Gentiles and of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully and to stone them. And they were aware of it. They knew about it.

So they fled unto Lystra. If it was possible for God to do signs and wonders, couldn't he have done something? Oh, but you see, God doesn't work that way. He wants to give men an opportunity to believe.

He wants to remove as many of the objections as he can to their believing. But he is not coercive or compulsive. He doesn't make them.

So they went to Lystra and Derbe and the cities of Lyconia and under the region that lieth about them. And what did they do? Say, here we've failed again. Is that what they did? No.

And there they preached the gospel. I believe that the miracle of God's grace that I want to see wrought in your heart and mine in this year is that we're going to sow beside all waters and that we're going to preach

the gospel and measure and manner that we never have before in spite of opposition and difficulty and inclination of our heart. We're going to realize that if we want to see the arm of the Lord revealed, then it's necessary for us to do the work of the Lord.

We will work in the night seasons. We will sow and teach and preach and distribute literature and use every available and possible means of communicating the message of his grace. And when God sees all of the wedges set in the log, he'll come along and hit them.

But meanwhile, I'm not going to worry about us not hitting them. What I'm going to worry about is, am I rejoicing in the midst of difficulty, my heart over the circumstances? Am I rejoicing in Christ and not in victory? Do I know the fullness of the Holy Spirit, boldly preaching Christ regardless of the opposition? This is the matter of concern to me. When these things are done, it's so easy for God to come.

He doesn't have to hit them blow at a time. He just presses gently and the wedges go through so softly, so nicely, and all that he wants accomplished is accomplished. Let us therefore hear what he has to say.

There they preach the gospel. This is God's work. Go into all the world and preach the gospel.

In your office, in your shop, wherever you work, whatever contacts you have, primarily, foremost, you are a witness for Jesus Christ. Maybe you're doing everything you can for Christ in your spare time, in your work, in your school, in your recreation. Maybe you are.

Maybe I am. I am afraid I am not. And I am committing my heart tonight to the commitment that I'm asking of you, that this year is going to see the miracle wrought in your life and mine wherein we are prepared to make our lives count daily for the witness for the Lord Jesus Christ.

If we'll do that, I'm absolutely confident that in his own way and time he'll strike every wedge that we set. Will you do it with me? Will you just let the Spirit of God speak to your heart and exhort, have the exhortation to this end? And there they preach the gospel, regardless of the circumstances. Father, we thank and praise thee that our wonderful Lord has not changed his government and plans day by day and year by year.

He doesn't have a five-year plan or fifty-year plan, but he told his disciples, go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. We thank thee, Father, for the testimony of others in other days. And we realize that we live in a day of many mediums that are available to us that weren't to our fathers.

We thank thee for the ministry of the printed page. Teach us as a church how to use it more effectively than we have in our community, in this great medium mission field of New York. Teach us how to use radio and how to use visitation.

God and Father of our Lord Jesus, help us to realize that every effect of the fullness of the Holy Spirit and in mature Christian life is to make us more effective witness for Christ. We believe, our Father, it is when we're using all we have that thou art prepared to give us more. And so we ask that there might come in this first Sunday in 1963 a commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ, so entire, so complete, so definite and pointed, that we know exactly what we're doing, not in any vague, indefinite way, but we are committing ourselves to him as a church and pastor and people to the end of a more effective witness, more wider witness, more pointed and direct witness to the unsaved around us and about us than we've ever had before.

We thank thee for the history of this church in this regard, for the vision of Dr. Simpson and Reading Theaters and every means of possible. Now grant, Lord, that in this year there will be a release from our own hearts and lives' need, these being met in Christ, until we'll be able to spend our time and energy and strength in exalting our wonderful Lord. To that end, may we see a sign and a wonder, a miracle wrought in our midst, that we become by thy grace and power a witnessing people, should there be among us one or more who does not know the Lord Jesus.

Might this be the night when their hearts are open to invite him in. For his name's sake. Amen.

Now let us stand for the benediction. As always, the invitation is given, and if you have need, we're here to share with you in it. And we urge you not to leave until you've made absolutely sure that you're in right relationship with Christ.

And now unto him who is able to do exceeding abundantly, above all we can ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages and including this year, world without end. Amen.

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