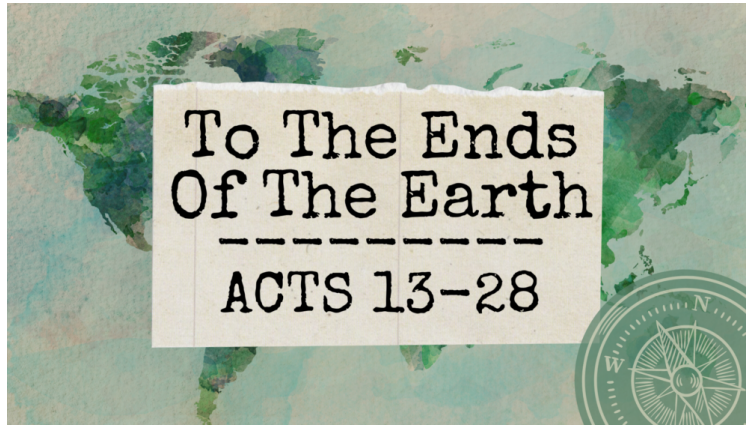


# The Mission is More Than Converts



**Acts 14:1-7, 19-28**

When it comes to the fall of the year, I'm a part-time trucker. This is because I'm trying to help Dad on the farm and we're trying to get the corn and soybeans out. That usually leads to a lot of college guys calling and asking if they can make some rounds with me. They have some things they want to talk about, so they can make a round to the granary with me. Sometimes a college guy will ride with me in the semi and it's like these mentoring moments. I remember last year there was a college student who came, and he said, "You know, I feel like God is calling me to missions." I said, "That's awesome! That's incredible that God is calling you to missions. Let's talk about that a little bit. Why do you think God is calling you to missions? What is it about missions that inspires you?" He said, "Well, I just know there is a lot of lostness all over the world. There are people who are dying and don't know the name of Christ. They don't have access to the gospel, and I want to go and share the gospel. I want to evangelize. That's why I want to do missions." I said, "That is awesome. That is a really good reason to do missions. Let me ask you a question. How does

the church fit into missions?" There was a long pause. He said, "Well, maybe a church will send me? Maybe pay for it? I don't know, but hopefully there will be a prayer engine behind me." I said, "Yeah, but after that, what does the church have to do with missions?" He said, "Well, I'm really not sure."

I would have probably answered the same when I was in college because I hadn't really connected the dots between missions and the church, but we will see in the text this morning that there is a vital link between missions and the church. In fact, we're going to see that missions do not just exist for converts, but missions actually exist for congregations. We don't just go and share the gospel so that people will know Christ; we share the gospel so that people who know Christ will then enter into congregations and become churches. In other words, missions exist so that more churches can be planted abroad. As my missions' professor would say, "The church is the agent and the object of missions." In other words, the church is the sending organism for missions. The church is responsible for missions, but the church is also the object. The church is the point of missions. We do missions so that lost people would come to Christ and become congregations, become churches.

This morning, we will see that Paul will do a very strange thing. He's going to take the long route home when it's obvious he should go the other direction. He's going to backtrack. The reason he's going to backtrack is because of this reality; his goal is not converts. That's involved, but his goal is congregations, congregations who would then send more people so that more converts would come to congregations.

We are going to read at the end of our section of Scripture, starting in verse 26 when Paul and Barnabas get home. They return to the church that sent them, tell them they fulfilled the work, and then declare what God has done. Then, we are going to backtrack and see what this means.

## Scripture

***"...and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. 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. And they remained no little time with the disciples."***

(That phrase 'the work' was also in chapter 13. The church sent them to do the work and now they're coming back because they had fulfilled the work.)

## Jewish Opposition at Iconium

We skipped some verses last week, but we're going back to those verses and cover a theme that we've been talking about for the last three weeks. That is this idea that the Word of God does the work of God. We've seen this all throughout Acts and all throughout Paul's missionary journey. He's proclaiming the Word and the Word is what does the work. We're going to see this very vividly in this text we're about to read. Chapter 14:1 says, "Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed." They are speaking in such a way...we've been tracking with Paul and Barnabas, so we know what that way is. They're speaking the good news; they're speaking the Word of God and a lot of people now come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, both Jew and Gentile.

Verse 2 says, "But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers." As the Word of God is spoken, there is opposition. These unbelieving Jews don't like this. They don't like that they are messing up the traditions. Paul and Barnabas are proclaiming this Jesus guy who they thought they got rid of by putting on a cross. Newsflash: He rose from the dead, which kind of makes the story that He's not important untrue. Paul and Barnabas are proclaiming Jesus everywhere they go, and people are turning to the gospel and being birthed into the Kingdom of God. The Jews are trying to oppose this; they want to poison

the mind of those who hear. They are saying these guys aren't right, they are tricking them and telling them false things.

## **God is Behind the Work**

We are going to see that God is working under, around, and behind His Word. It is not just Paul and Barnabas talking; it's God working. Verse 3 says, "So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands." I've got to be honest. The first time I read this, I was confused. I see Paul and Barnabas are "speaking boldly for the Lord who bore witness," and I'm thinking who is the 'who?' Is this Paul? Is this Barnabas? Who is the 'who' in this text? As I read it a few times, I realized the 'who' is the Lord! The Lord is the 'who' in this sentence. I want to show you that this is really important because we are going to find there is a 'who' behind the 'what.' There is a lot of 'what' happening. People are coming to faith, miracles are happening, things are changing, there is a lot of 'what' going on. We are going to see there is a 'who' behind the 'what,' and the 'who' is God. The 'who' is not Paul and Barnabas, they are just speaking; God is doing something through His Word. They are speaking boldly for the Lord.

Notice what their speech is about. It's not for themselves and it's not primarily for the people; they are speaking for the Lord. They are sent on behalf of, to speak on behalf of the Lord. They are the mouthpiece of the Lord, and then we see that little word, who: "*Who* bore witness to the word of His grace granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands." They are speaking, but there is a 'who' that is moving. There is a 'who' that is working. There is a power at work, and it is not Paul and Barnabas; it is the power of God. That is good news for us. It is good news for us that in the gospel we proclaim there is a 'who' behind the 'what.' Whatever results, whatever we want to happen, there is a 'who' behind that, and the 'who' is the Lord. That's why we say it is the Word of God that does the work of God. How does that happen? It is through the Spirit of God. It's the power of God that takes His Word and does His work. What is our role? Our role is to proclaim the Word, and He is the 'who' behind the 'what.'

It's like when you get in your car, crank it up, put it in drive, and then you push the pedal with your foot. When you push the pedal with your foot, the car actually goes; it moves. You speed down the interstate because you're pushing a little lever, but we all know there is more going on than just you pushing the lever. You pushing the pedal is not what's making the car go. Pushing the pedal is engaging the engine, and the engine is making the car go. Your role is to push, but there is a lot more going on under the hood that is causing the results. This is the same when we share the gospel and proclaim the Word to people. We are pushing the pedal, but there is a lot more going on under the hood. God is working with His Word to change the lives of those we proclaim to. Take heart because it is not just you! It's not just Barnabas and Paul. Yes, they are speaking, but there is a 'who' behind the 'what,' and the 'who' is God. God is doing things through His Word. The 'what' is that things are happening. There are miracles going on, people are coming to Christ, and a lot of people are believing. That is God doing things through His Word.

### **Paul and Barnabas Flee**

Verses 4–7 say, "But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, and there they continued to preach the gospel." We know this from last week. They were run out of the synagogue so they are having to flee because, well, when somebody wants to stone you, you probably need to get out of there. That's what they did. They run and go to a place called Derbe and Lystra. We saw in last week's sermon that Lystra is the place where Paul spoke to a guy, the guy became well, and it caused mayhem. The miracle produced mayhem, Paul contextualized the gospel to this certain culture, and a lot of them believed. So, the gospel goes forth to the Gentiles, and then the Jews hear about it and they aren't very happy. Let's see what happens after that incident, the miracle.

## **The Jews Stone Paul**

Remember that the crowd said Paul and Barnabas were gods and they were going to worship them, but in a few days, things change. Verse 19 says, "But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium..." (Now, we don't really know those places because we're not really familiar with that side of the world in this time period so we just hear those as places, but this is about a hundred miles from where they are. There are no cars. The Jews are traveling a hundred miles to come and confront Paul and Barnabas because they are making such a splash on the scene. There is so much disruption that they're willing to travel days and days to try and stop this gospel presentation!) Verse 19 continues, "...and having persuaded the crowds, (these are the crowds who worship Paul and Barnabas, and the Jews are going to try to persuade the crowds to think they are criminals) they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead."

I just want you to think about that for a moment. What would that scene be like? You have these Jews who have traveled a hundred miles because they're angry at this proclamation of the gospel, they surround the guy in charge (Paul), and they begin to pick up stones and hurl them at him, blow after blow, trying to execute him. You can imagine there is a lot of blood. They assume they have killed him. Then, they drag him out of the city thinking they were dragging a dead corpse. It would have been a lot of suffering, a lot of pain that Paul endured for the sake of the gospel. Paul will reference that several times in his letters...*I have suffered. I have been persecuted because the gospel is more important than my life. The gospel is more important than my comfort.* The same is true today. The gospel is more important than our lives and more important than our comforts. We have to be willing because there is going to be opposition that comes along when we stand up for the truth of the gospel. Paul is someone we can look to as a guy who endured great suffering for the words he said.

## **Paul Perseveres in His Mission**

Verse 20 says, "But 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." The disciples gather around Paul, supposing that he's dead, I'm sure. And then verse 21 says, "When they had preached the gospel to that city..."

What? I thought this guy just got beat up so badly that he was left for dead! The Jews tried to kill him; they think he is dead, so you can imagine he's not doing well. And the disciples come around and are like, *Man, I can't believe Paul is gone!* All of a sudden, Paul starts breathing and gets up, mangled, you can imagine, and he is like, *Alright, let's go...* and the next day he walks into the next city and he's like, *I've got news!* Can you imagine what the city would have seen? He probably had bandages all over him and there he is ready to preach. Can you imagine how much pain Paul is in as he is proclaiming the gospel that, by the way, almost got him killed? And, he probably thought the Jews would keep coming and try it again, but his mission is to preach the gospel. He wants people to know about Jesus, even when it costs him greatly.

Notice what verse 21 says next, "When they preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples..." Think about that. Paul is a missionary being sent by a church, and here is the proclamation: He has been preaching the gospel and he has made many disciples. I don't know about you, but I would think that is a successful mission trip. Some of you have been on mission trips, and if you could come back and tell your friends and family you made many disciples; that is success! If you came back with videos of baptisms and tales of all these people who had come to Christ, you would assume that was a fulfilled mission trip. Thumbs up! It would be amazing because you made disciples! But for Paul, that's not the end of the mission trip. Paul doesn't see making disciples as him fulfilling the work. We are going to see that in the next line of the text.

### **The Long Route Home**

Notice the next line after they had made many disciples, "they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch..." This is Luke putting a little bombshell in there. This would be like me saying I left my house in Murray, KY, and went to Nashville, then to New York, then I flew to LA, then to Dallas, and then I came back to Nashville because the journey was over. Then it was time to go home, so I flew back to LA, back to Dallas, and then back to Murray KY. You would be like, what? Isn't it closer to go from Nashville to Murray than to go back to LA? That is not a trip home; that's a

trip back. Why would you backtrack? That is what is going on here. Look at this map so we can get our heads around the crazy thing Paul does here.



The blue line is his missionary journey. He goes from Antioch, to Cyprus, Pamphylia, the other Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and then Derbe. He is beat down in Lystra, makes it to Derbe, and the mission trip is basically over. He's been to all the places he is going to, and now it's time to go home. This should be the R&R day.

If you've been on a mission trip, you have an R&R day. I love those days. Like in Brazil, you do all this work and then you get to go hike in a jungle. They bring a three-toed sloth you get to hold and they put an anaconda around your neck. They take pictures; it's just awesome! If you go to Nicaragua, the same is true on R&R day. You get to zipline off of a volcano, you get to hold a monkey, and you get to buy some souvenirs. That is how mission trips end. You visit all the places and then you have a really good R&R day.

Paul doesn't do that. Look at Derbe on the map. If you were in Derbe and you had just got beaten up to within an inch of your life, and your home church is Antioch, (and by the way, you are from Tarsus) what would be your journey home if you were Paul? I would think...*I'm going to Tarsus!* 'Hey Grandma, I just got beat up, can you make me some food?' From

there, you just have to get on a boat to Antioch and you're home! What did you do on the mission trip? You made many disciples! That is not what Paul does. Instead, he turns around from Derbe and backtracks to every place he went. He has been beaten up to within an inch of his life, so he is hobbling back, visiting every place that he went.

## **The Purpose of the Mission**

Why would Paul do that? He has made disciples, so mission accomplished. No, we are going to see the reason he does that is because the mission is not just making more disciples. The mission is not just more converts; the mission is more congregations. Paul goes back to these cities to leave a church in every place he touched. He's going to go back to plant churches because, ultimately, all of those places don't just need believers, they need churches. Paul knows he is not just going and telling orphans that they can have a Father in Heaven if they believe in Jesus. Yes, that's part of the message, but there is another part of the message that says you also get a family of brothers and sisters here on earth! You get a whole family here on earth to bring Heaven to earth to live as an outpost of the Kingdom, an expression of the body of Christ together. You get to come together to be the family of God. You're not just going to go to Heaven one day; you get to live with a people who are living out Heaven right now on this earth. He has a vision, and the vision is for congregations.

I remember being a kid going to Brazil, and I always wondered why we spent so much time at the church. If you've been on a Hardin mission trip, you know half our time is spent in whatever church they have. Along the Amazon River, there are all these little churches we have built and helped furnish, and strengthened. We always focus on the church and my thought is that we are going to reach the lost, but these are the 'founds.' They've already found Jesus. Why are we spending so much time in the churches? Of course, we did go into the streets and villages to share the gospel, but it always ended up with VBS or worship service at the church. Everything ended up at the church, and I just thought why are we in the pews so much when we could be in the streets? I didn't realize as a kid that the hope of the streets and these villages are not Americans coming for a week; the hope of the streets and the villages actually comes in those

pews that we're spending time in. When we leave, the church is there. It is the church who will reach that village. The church is going to reach that community because it is those pews going into those streets, so we have to make sure we have our eyes on those churches.

## **Church Planting**

That's what Paul doesn't just go home. It's not R&R day ziplining off of a volcano or telling stories and jetting back. No, he's going to backtrack for this purpose: to plant churches. Why? Because missions are not just about converts, missions exist for congregations who worship the Lord together. How do we know this? Let's see what Paul did on that return trip according to verse 22, "...strengthening the souls of the disciples..." There will be four things they are going to do in the churches.

1. Strengthening
2. Encouraging
3. Appointing
4. Committing

### **• Strengthen the souls of the disciples**

It's not enough for Paul to just make a disciple; he wants to strengthen the soul of the disciple. It's not just so the people will understand the gospel; it's so the gospel would get into them and grow in them. Paul doesn't just want people to have a new residence in Heaven when they die; he wants them to live out the gospel right here, right now, to experience new life in Christ. So Paul goes back to those disciples they had made because they need to be strengthened. Just from this little phrase, we learn that if you're a disciple you need to be strengthened. Paul journeyed back to strengthen the disciples he made. If you're a disciple, you need to be strengthened and you need to strengthen other disciples. That's one of the roles of the church. That's one of the reasons you're here with other people and not just by yourself. We repeat this phrase, 'find your people,' and it's really important. The reason it's important is because of these things like strengthening and encouraging, and Paul is going to do both of them. You need to find your people, whether that be in a Sunday school, a small

group, a discipleship group, or a serving team. Find your people, connect with a smaller group of people, so that you can strengthen them and they can strengthen you. You need to be strengthened. This is vital. Paul didn't go home; he went back. For what purpose? Mainly to plant churches, but that involved strengthening the disciples.

- **Encouraging them to Continue in the Faith**

Verse 22 continues, "...encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God." Why does Paul encourage them? It is because through many tribulations, you are going to enter the Kingdom. In other words, there will be some bumps in the road ahead. You're on the narrow path now and it's not wide and easy. It is narrow and hard and people are going to be against you, and you need encouragement. So, if you are a disciple of the Lord you need to be strengthened and you need to be encouraged, and you need to be strengthening someone and encouraging someone. We need to do that as believers because we, too, are going to face a bump in the road tomorrow. As the song says, we are "prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love." That is actually true of us! So we need someone to encourage us to continue in the faith, to keep chasing after Jesus.

I love what Truett Cathy, the founder of Chick-fil-A, said, "Do you know how you can tell if someone needs encouraging? If they are breathing." That is how you know. If they are breathing, they need encouragement. We all need encouragement, all of the time! Paul goes back to encourage people, and that is part of the role of a Christian. We need to encourage people, and we need encouragement. We need to be doing those things with one another because there are bumps in the road that we need encouragement to get over.

- **Appointing Elders**

Then we come to this phrase in verse 23, which gets at the heart of what we are trying to say, "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." Look at the first part, "And when they had appointed elders for them in every church..." Why did Paul take the long

road home? Why did he skip R&R day, and going to grandma's house, and floating a boat back to the church saying we made a whole lot of disciples and baptized a whole lot of people? It was because that wasn't the goal. That wasn't the work. The work was not just converts; the work was congregations. The work was churches. For Paul to say the work is done, the work is fulfilled, he is not just leaving a people who know who Jesus is in his wake, he is having people come together to worship Jesus as a local expression of His body, which is the Church. That's the goal of the mission. That's the point of the mission. Paul is sent by the church at Antioch (which is the agent) to cause a whole lot more churches to be spread abroad because the hope of the nations is not Paul preaching the gospel; the hope of the nations is churches sending others to preach the gospel and make more churches. The hope of the gospel isn't individual Christians; it is the churches we leave in the wake of our mission effort that will then be expressions of those who worship and love God. The goal is not just converts; the goal is churches. Paul is leaving these places and he's going back home only when there is a church.

Notice what it says, "...they had appointed elders for them in every church..." I want to ask a few questions about elders.

1. What exactly is an elder?
2. What exactly does an elder do?
3. Why doesn't Hardin have elders?

We read about elders in the Bible, so why don't we have them? When you read through Scripture of what an elder is, the office, that person, can be referred to in a few different ways. There is elder, pastor, bishop, or overseer. Bishop and overseer is basically the same word. It is all referring to the same thing. An elder is one who shepherds the flock. Putting it together, an elder is a pastor, and a pastor is an elder. They would have a tradition with the Jews. The elders ruled. The elders set things up. Elders apply to the ones who would shepherd the flock, care for the flock, and lead, feed, and protect the sheep.

How do we know that elder is really just a pastor? In Acts 20, Paul calls for the elders from the city and tell them some things. Verse 17 says, "Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to

come to him." Then, it says in verse 28, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock..." There is 'yourselves,' and then there is 'the flock.' What does a flock have? A flock has a shepherd. Then it says, "...in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood." So God is basically saying *Hey elders, you better watch out, and you better make sure you are shepherding the flock well because you're the overseer. You're the one who is in care of them. By the way, I bought them with my blood, so you better not mess with my bride!* The elder is a pastor. Jeremy Rinne, in the church elder book in the 9Marks series, says an elder shepherds the flock. That is who an elder is. A pastor is an elder, and an elder is a pastor. They feed, lead, and protect the sheep, as we see in that text.

I get asked this question a lot, especially with college students. Why doesn't Hardin have elders? The answer is we do. We have five of them, actually. We have Bro. Ricky, Bro. Kory, Pastor Nick, Pastor Chris, and Pastor Matt. Now we have Chase, our middle school director, who is in the pathway to hopefully become Pastor Chase. That is an elder. Pastor/elder is the same person, same thing. That is what we do. We are the shepherds of the flock. Hardin does have elders, and we call them pastors.

Why do we need a leader? Why do we need a spiritual leader, a pastor/overseer? Hebrews tells us, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you." The writer of Hebrews is saying obey your leaders because they are caring for your soul. The picture is that we are sheep who need a shepherd. That's what Paul knew. He was calling the sheep, and the sheep were coming to faith in Christ. They were becoming new, but sheep need a shepherd. They needed shepherds to shepherd them, so Paul leaves leaders of the churches. He leaves pastors to shepherd them, to lead and protect them.

- **Committing the Church to the Lord**

Notice what else Paul does before he leaves. He is leaving churches in his wake, and after appointing elders/pastors to those churches, it says, "...with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed." I think 'them' are not just the pastors, but the whole church. They are committing them, the whole church, to the Lord. The church belongs to the Lord. We, at Hardin Baptist, belong to the Lord. That means that your pastors are not in charge of this thing. Jesus is. It is the Lord's thing. We are under-shepherds under Him. He is the Good Shepherd. He is the one who leads our church. We just try to shepherd under Him.

So, with prayer and fasting, Paul and Barnabas leave the church to God. Again, why did Paul take the long journey home? He could have gone the easy route. He's already made disciples. The reason is because the goal is not just converts; the goal is congregations. He's leaving churches in his wake.

### **Paul and Barnabas Return Home—The Work Fulfilled**

Luke says in verses 24–26, "Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled." There is that word again, work. They were sent to do the work, and now they are coming back. It is the work "that they had fulfilled." They've done it! They have completed the work, not just to share the gospel, not just to make disciples, but to plant churches, to leave churches in their wake.

Verses 27–28 say, "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. And they remained no little time with the disciples." When they got back home, they called the church together. The whole church wanted to hear the stories and what all happened with Paul and Barnabas. They probably heard rumors about being worshipped and being stoned. Paul and Barnabas come in and they declare something. They declare all that the Lord had done with them. That is a good way to celebrate a mission trip! They didn't come back and say check out what all *we* did with the Lord! No, that is not how the sentence goes. They say check out what the *Lord* has done with us...*we*

*are the tool, we are the vessel, we are the little guys pushing the pedal!*

There is something going on under the hood. There is a 'who' behind the 'what' and the 'who' is God. God is the one who did everything on this trip, and Paul and Barnabas are declaring to them all that God has done. That is how a good mission trip ends. It ends with a slideshow that says look what God did! It's not look what I did. When Paul and Barnabas came back, the whole point was to celebrate what God had done because it is all through God and for God, and to His glory.

## **Missions—The Hope of the Nations**

We see God's vision for missions is not just that more people would know about Jesus. It includes that. It's not just that orphans would find a heavenly Father and become sons and daughters. It is that, but it is also so those orphans who become sons and daughters would also realize they have brothers and sisters. They are part of a family and the family is the church. They are not just waiting to go to Heaven one day to meet their heavenly Father. Right now, they are celebrating coming together with their family of brothers and sisters to be an outpost of the Kingdom of God that shows this is what Heaven is like. Just come and be around us, the family, and you will see what eternity will be like. That is what Paul wanted to leave in his wake, not just a bunch of converts, but congregations who are living out the gospel together.

As I think back to mission trips I have led in Nicaragua, Arizona, and other places, when I wonder why we spend so much time in the churches who already have the gospel instead of the streets, the communities, and schools where the people who need the gospel are, I have to remind myself of this: the hope in Nicaragua and the hope in Arizona is not a team going into the streets and sharing the gospel for that week. The hope for those places is those pews that we visit because the pews are what will ultimately affect those streets. That is why at Hardin we love to partner with and talk about various missions we give to and go with. Do you know why we love Gospel Life in Malawi? It is because they are not just trying to make converts; they are planting churches and strengthening pastors. The reason we go with AMOR to Brazil is because they want churches all along the Amazon River. It is why we send our pastor to those pastors, so he can

teach them. Why do we care about those pastors? It is because the church matters in missions! It is the agent and the object of missions. That is why we go with Partners in Christ to Nicaragua. It is because their goal is to partner a church in America with a church in Nicaragua so that we would strengthen and make more disciples through the church, for the church. There is a reason we link with Live Love Ministries. Eric and Brittany are not just trying to share the gospel with natives on a reservation just so more believers would happen. That is one of the reasons, but they are there to try and plant churches among the natives through their renovations, so that in three hundred years when they are dead and gone there are churches proclaiming the gospel and sending missionaries to make more churches. The hope is not just us going for a few days, or for a few years. The hope is in the church, which is both the agent and the object of missions.

Why did Paul make a return trip and go all the way back through those cities? It was because his goal was not just to make disciples. It wasn't just to make converts. His goal was that those converts would become congregations. What do missions have to do with the church? Everything. The church is the agent. The church is also the object.