

# Acts

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[ 0 : 00 ]     The word which is on my mind to bring before you, dependence upon the Lord, is found in the 14th chapter of the book of Acts.

Really it's in part of verse 22. I'll read verses 21 and 22 in the 14th chapter of Acts.

And when they, that is Barnabas and Paul, had preached the gospel to that city and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra and to Iconium and Antioch, that is Antioch in Pisidia, 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.

They were very suitable ministers to take on such a task to confirm the souls of these disciples and to exhort them in this way.

Paul and Barnabas had really come, so to speak, to the end of their first missionary journey as such. When they reached Derbe, they couldn't really go on any further in that direction.

[ 1 : 34 ]     But there was, from there, really a short and very convenient way back to Antioch in Syria, overland.

It would have been through Tarsus, where Paul was born, and he must have known that way well. But they turned their backs on that road, and they went back.

They went back to Lystra, where Paul had very recently been almost stoned to death. They went back to Iconium, where there had been an insurrection made when both Paul and Barnabas were in great danger of being stoned.

They went back to Iconium, where, again, there had been such persecution raised that they had been expelled from those regions.

Clearly, they were going back into cities where there was great danger to their lives. And in spite of all the suffering that they had endured, they were clearly still continuing in the faith and continuing to preach that gospel in spite of all the opposition they encountered.

[ 3 : 01 ]     And so they were most suitable people to speak such a word as this, and that it might be left on record for our own edification.

They certainly knew what they were speaking about, not only because of the authority of their commission from the Lord, the authority of their own personal experience in spiritual things, but because of the outstanding example of faith and courage and continuation that the apostles were showing.

It was not only those sufferings that I've mentioned, but there were many other tribulations that they were experiencing evidently.

Those long overland journeys must have been very wearisome and tedious, as that record in Corinthians indicates.

And then they had lost one of their companions, John Mark, who had gone back early in that journey. And then they experienced the very sad case of the Jewish brethren, that so many of their own countrymen in these places were so bitter, and so opposed the truth, how their unbelief and hatred must have grieved the apostles.

[ 4 : 41 ] And then also later, into these very churches of Galatia were introduced those dangerous, poisonous errors, were those who came amongst them, telling them that they must be circumcised and observe the law of Moses and so on, and encouraged them to go back to some dependence upon works for their salvation.

And so Paul was obliged to write that epistle to the Galatians, evidently in much sorrow and distress of heart. There was certainly much tribulation in their experiences.

And clearly, they were saying these things by divine authority.

God had shown them that this was the case, and therefore they taught the disciples in this way. They went back for this particular purpose, to confirm the souls of the disciples in the truth, and to exhort them to continue in the faith, and that we must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God.

Clearly, those who remained in such a region as that were bound to face actual persecution.

[ 6 : 20 ] They were but very young in the faith. They greatly needed this confirmation and this exhortation that the apostles went back to deliver to them.

Well, in the word we can see plainly that there is the expectation of tribulation. There is the exhortation to continue in the faith.

And there is finally the entrance into the kingdom of God. In these very simple and most important ways, the truth was again set before these young believers.

And how much we all do need the same instruction and counsel still. For we are surely not without a tribulation.

Well, first then, there is this expectation that is plainly marked out by these apostles that it must be through much tribulation that we enter into the kingdom of God.

[ 7 : 37 ] There is no avoiding some tribulation, and we see much tribulation in various ways. The word tribulation, which is sometimes often rendered affliction or even anguish, comes from a word which really means pressure, and indicates the effect, particularly of a heavy burden pressing down on someone and making it so difficult to proceed and to continue because of that particular and constant pressure.

tribulation indicates some kind of pressure upon the heart, upon the spirit especially.

And it is evidently very common amongst the people of God. It is not on my mind this evening to go into the various different aspects of this matter, which, apart from what I have mentioned concerning the apostles themselves and the various trials and troubles that they must have been constantly enduring in these dangerous travels and in these very wearisome journeys that they were making for the sake of the gospel.

You have no doubt your tribulation in your life. There are no doubt those things which do tend to press you down and wear you out.

And the apostles say that this is to be expected. But believers especially cannot hope to pass through this world without much tribulation.

[ 9 : 47 ] We may not at present face much persecution in the way that in these days it did rise up.

It is clear that in the days of the apostles this did vary. There were those times when the churches had rest.

At other times a sore persecution rose up against them. At the moment in this country we are favored to have a period virtually free from this intense religious persecution.

But we should not count on that. Continuing indefinitely. But in other ways there is sure to be much of this tribulation of one kind or another.

And the apostles indicated to these young believers that there would be much of it.

[ 10 : 58 ] They were not to be dismayed or surprised when there was much. The word much means really either many, many tribulations or great ones.

Or it may well be both. But there may be a matter of great tribulations. Or it may be a question of many of them.

It is similar to that word in Peter which we considered a while back. Where the apostle Peter then says that in this wonderful hope he says, Wherein we greatly rejoice.

Though now for a season if need be. We are in heaviness through manifold temptations. You see there is that heaviness.

The effect of this downward pressure. And they are manifold temptations. They are in variety. And it may well be unexpectedly so.

[ 12 : 07 ] And also often they are severe. And certainly it was so in the case of these apostles. Again and again they met tribulation in some form or other.

And the apostle James says, No, no, Peter, he says, Think it not strange. Which of course we all do so tend to do.

Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial. Which is to try you. As though some strange thing happened unto you. But rejoice.

Inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings. That when his glory shall be revealed. Ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

You see there is this word here. Must. It is a striking word. The apostle said that there would be no avoidance.

[ 13 : 17 ] It is a must. And why should that be such a necessity? It is not a matter of chance.

It is not, finally, a matter of the unbelief and bitterness and opposition of men. Or even of the evil one himself.

It is really God himself who says that this must be so. There is a need for it. The same word is used by the Savior twice in the end of the Gospel of Luke.

When he said first to those Emmaus disciples, ought. That is, must not. Ought not Christ who suffered these things and to enter into his glory?

Was there not an absolute necessity for the Savior to suffer before he entered his glory? And is there not also in another aspect of the truth a corresponding necessity for believers in Christ, the followers of him?

[ 14 : 35 ] The followers of him? To pass through tribulation before they enter into glory? And then later in that chapter, he says, Thus it behoved.

Thus it was necessary for it to be. It was a must. Thus it behoved Christ to suffer. And to rise again from the dead.

That repentance might be preached to all nations. There is, as you may remember also, a must earlier in this book of the Acts, where Peter said, concerning the beginning of our faith, the matter of salvation itself.

But there is none other name given under heaven whereby ye must be saved. There is a necessity in these things of which we read.

The necessity first of salvation, faith in the Lord Jesus, and then of this pathway of tribulation. It is most necessary, and there is much fruit from it.

[ 16 : 08 ] So much is wrought by these experiences, sanctified by the grace of God. They have their very definite effects.

Gold in the furnace tried near, loseth all but grass. So is the Christian purified and bettered by the cross.

The fires of tribulation may have their gracious effect by the power of the Spirit of God. Many blessed fruits really result from this experience.

There is humility and communion and fellowship with the Saviour in his suffering.

There is the proof in the trial of faith and the letting of patience have her perfect work.

[ 17 : 24 ] there is so much good that often results from this matter of much tribulation. We may be sure that it is really the Lord himself who is saying that we must pass through much tribulation.

It is for our own God, it is a necessity that we should thus be prepared to enter into the kingdom of God, the kingdom of glory.

And there is a precious preposition here. The Apostle says it is through much tribulation. It is not just being brought near to it or round it or under or over it.

that is not the Lord's purpose. It is not even said that they would be brought into tribulation but to be brought through that is in so to speak at one side and out at the other and not coming out the same as they went in.

Because of the effect, the gracious effect of tribulation sanctified to the good of the soul. So, we read that promise in the Old Testament in Zechariah where God says concerning his people I will bring the third part through the fire and will refine them as gold is refined and so on.

[ 19 : 14 ] he will bring them through not just into the fire but right through it. And so this was the message to these believers.

They could not expect or hope to be exempt from this very necessary course, very painful course of instruction in these things.

they must. And so if we are following the Saviour it is for us. You must pass through much tribulation.

And so it is no use avoiding this issue or being surprised that it should be so. read of how the Apostle Paul sent Titus to the church at Thessalonica for this purpose that he might encourage and comfort them concerning their faith and that he says this that no man should be moved by these afflictions for he says ye yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto we are appointed if we are followers of Christ to a pathway of tribulation those tribulations are appointed for us they are the Lord's own appointments it is certainly true as we sing that their sorrows in the scales he weighs and measures out their pains they are appointed and so there was this expectation set before them they were not promised any kind of easy pathway but quite the reverse they were to anticipate the very necessary very difficult time and course of spiritual instruction they were to go through this wilderness of tribulation but then to help them in this there was the exhortation because of this particularly the apostles knew this and knew that it must be so with these believers then they gave them this exhortation and how very simple and expressive is this apostolic

Christianity very plain and straightforward exactly to the point they were to continue in the faith it was after this that so many complexities and complications and difficulties were added but the primitive kind of Christianity was so beautifully simple and expressive Barnabas previously had been to Syria and Antioch and had seen the grace of God there and he had exhorted them in a similar way in that place it is said that they were to believe to the Lord believe to the Lord Jesus Christ in all their troubles and difficulties and here in a similar way they are told exhorted to continue in the faith for the whole purpose of these persecutions as far as men and the evil one were concerned was to stop them continuing it was to bring their course to a halt but in spite of all they were to go on the faith clearly is the faith the truth as it is in

[ 23 : 17 ] Jesus in which they had been instructed for these apostles went from place to place preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ he was their great theme and so the truth the faith really means that faith which centers in the person of Jesus Christ and in his word it would include the truth of his person that he is the eternal God and a sinless man in one person to nature so united and raised from the dead in his own body it would certainly center upon the perfect redemption that he had brought in that atonement for sin that he had made and that triumphant resurrection from the dead on the third day of the week his exhortation to the right hand of God to the throne of God on high his intercession there and his coming again at the end of time all these things in detail had been said before these disciples it was the faith the truth that is in

Jesus that they were to continue in dear friends that is so much what we all need to do again and again we have it in these scriptures Paul writing to Timothy says concerning this very matter he said that Timothy knew very well what because he was in this region at the time that he knew well what afflictions and persecutions the apostle had encountered at Iconium and Lystra and Antioch what persecutions I endured he says but out of them all the Lord delivered me and they that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution and then he goes on to say but continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of knowing of whom thou hast learned the great message to him when he was also liable to be subject to these intense afflictions and persecutions he was also to continue in the truth to hold fast the form of sound words so Jesus himself taught his disciples before there were those who came to him and professed a faith in him he said to them if ye continue in my word then ye my disciples indeed and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free and to his own disciples he said that they were to abide in him and keep his commandments he says continue ye in my life it's one thing to begin but it's another to continue when the way becomes hard and rough and the opposition is great and the pressures really come and yet that is just what the apostles exhorted these people to do whatever happened whatever should happen to them however their lives should be threatened and their property taken away or whatever persecutions they faced they were to continue in the faith to hold it fast whatever should fall to their lot so the apostle wrote to the

Colossian believers in a similar way and said that it was God's gracious purpose toward them to prepare them and to present them at last in that way holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight but it really in a sense depended upon that as a means to the end he says if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel when unto you have been called there were those things that would come and would tend to move them away from the hope of the gospel lest they should continue in the faith so there is a great need for this are you continuing in the faith are you resolved by the grace of God to hold it fast whatever should come in this changeable world whatever tribulations might afflict you and then there is also finally the entrance here mentioned the entrance into the kingdom of

God now the must really applies to that just as much as the affliction it is that we must though now through much affliction enter into the kingdom of God if we continue in the faith then that is a blessed necessity in the end the road leads to the heavenly city now there are various aspects of entering into the kingdom of God spiritually we enter into the kingdom when we are born again and brought to believe and trust in the saviour alone openly we are brought to enter into the kingdom of God into his church below when we are baptized and added to the church of

God on earth but eternally we enter into the kingdom of God at the end of this present life clearly that can be the only way in which it is meant in this place there is much tribulation first but there is this glorious prospect so soon after in this verse it is immediately following the much tribulation the entrance into the kingdom and what a wonderful strength and comfort and support it would be to these believers and it should be to all to think that when this little space this little spell of much tribulation is over there would be the entry into the everlasting kingdom and the apostle Peter exhorted his readers to add to their faith virtue and so on and he said if you do these things ye shall never fall for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our

[ 31 : 33 ] Lord Jesus Christ there would be that abundant entrance after this much tribulation and so clearly these believers were encouraged to remember that although there was this prospect of tribulation here below there was also a much brighter glorious prospect just ahead of entering into this kingdom of glory where the king of kings reigns where his glory is revealed and where they come into his presence forever to be forever with the Lord to be like him in that kingdom of peace and love of such pure praise and worship of everlasting joy now if you are in this way if you continue in the faith as disciples and pass through your own portion of much tribulation here there is so soon this blessed wonderful prospect of entering into the gates through the gates into that glorious city of entering forever into the presence of the

Lord where this hope is how precious it will really be to those who are in suffering Peter of course put it in that way in his own epistle to those who were so troubled and set before them an inheritance undefiled incorruptible undefiled and that fadeth not away reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation though there were those manifold temptations or tribulations now there was this inheritance before them this wonderful hope and prospect of eternal life of eternal glory of endless and indescribable bliss in the presence of the Lord himself so dear friends in this word we have these things brought before us for our own consideration for our edification and comfort we shall not be without our tribulation if we are in this way we are not to regard it just as a nuisance to get through as quickly as we can but for a necessary discipline chastening by the hand which is all love the most necessary and important course of instruction well in this word then we are reminded of these things and taught first to remember what the apostles came back especially to tell these people that it was of course a way of much tribulation that they would not possibly be able to avoid in various ways and various times to various extents there would be much tribulation in their pathway and it is certainly so with every believer there is much to try their faith much to burden their hearts much to press through to the kingdom of God and it is no use refusing to face this plain truth because otherwise we only become disheartened and discouraged and over distressed when this tribulation comes now the

Lord himself through his apostles made this very plain the we includes every one of us who is also a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ we must through much tribulation come but we are not only just to remember that we are also to receive the exhortation read in the Hebrews that tender word where the writer says suffer the word of exhortation brethren suffer that word of exhortation it is the most necessary one that it should come and be received into our hearts now particularly in this context of much tribulation the apostle says continue in the faith and the

Lord says through his servants this is the essential thing to do however the sore the tribulation is however great the distress and pain in our hearts the vital thing is to continue in the faith never to give it up to consider it to cleave to it and to cleave to the Lord himself who is the great center and theme of the faith to cleave to the words of Jesus and the truth as it is in Jesus and then also there is this to rejoice in this prospect evidently this is implied we must enter finally if we are brought this way for the Lord will surely bring us there we must enter into the kingdom of God and surely that is ground for much rejoicing already the

Savior told his disciples it was he says blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you for my sake rejoice and be exceeding glad not because you are persecuted but because great is your reward in heaven for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you and the apostles as well James says count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations that is really into much tribulation count it all joy not because the tribulations themselves can possibly be enjoyable but because of the fruit that is to be expected through the grace of

[ 39 : 32 ] God knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience but let patience have her perfect work that she may be perfect and entire wanting nothing again and again the word of God says rejoice in these circumstances think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you but rejoice in as much as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings that when his glory shall be revealed ye may be glad also with exceeding joy for these things are constantly linked together present sufferings and future glory clearly it is the case in those things that are said concerning Jesus himself there was his suffering first and then entering into his glory and we read such words as that if we suffer with him we shall also reign with him our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory may the

Lord bless his word to our hearts amen hymn 307 tune 544 hymn 307 370 and must it Lord be so and must thy children bear such various kinds of woe such soul perplexing fear are these the blessings we expect is this the lot of God's elect hymn 370 and must it and must it Lord be so and must thy children bear such love so thou art by us my name heart you named

We expect Is this the Lord of God's elect?

O star, ye sons of earth, No more with strong eyes, Above your highest, Of our saddest house we rise, For thou, thou cast, She's filled with gold, Thou something secret We turn home.

How, how so bad the way Till Savior still be gone, No, leave us till we say, Father, I will be gone.

[ 44 : 17 ] And not we do, But take the cup, For thou alone Hast done it far.

Shall guilty man complain, Shall sinful drums with high, And what is cold, How life compare't with mine, Shall life, Come help with mine, Finish, dear Lord, What is the Lord, What is the God, To come the way That's the early God.

The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, The Savior, The love of God, The Father, The fellowship and communion, Of the Holy Spirit, The Comforter, Abide with us all, Now and forever.

Amen.