

# Between the Church and Chaos Stands . . . Who?

## Acts 14:21-28

preached @ Hawkwood Baptist Church  
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February 12, 2017

### Intro.

- This is one of those days when the circumstances of church life dictate the subject matter for the sermon. Let me explain.
- You know that John and Julie Ryan are probably leaving town soon. In preparation for this Julie has resigned as our Children's Ministry Director, Sandra Tegart has graciously stepped forward to serve as the interim director, and our Ministry Council has formed a committee to begin looking for Julie's successor.
- But what we haven't emphasized is that when John leaves, we will lose one of our elders.
- And the other thing we haven't really mentioned is that this is Edu's last Sunday with us before he goes off to Chile for a year of further medical training. That means another elder gone.
- Suddenly, from six serving elders we're down to four. Our constitution declares a minimum of three, but practically we need more than four. In my opinion five is a minimum, but seven or more is ideal.
- Obviously we need to rebuild our elder board, and as elders we're asking all of you who belong to the HBC body of Christ to help us do it. If you aren't a member, you can help through your prayers and encouragement.
- Here's what we're asking you to do. On the page the ushers are handing out you will find listed all the men in our church 21 and older. You will also find those who are currently serving as elders listed separately. Theoretically, anyone in the larger list is a qualified candidate to serve as one of our elders. And, btw, if we've left anyone off the list it was unintentional and I want to apologize beforehand. Please let us know if you were left off, and we'll let the church know by e-mail that they should add your name.
- Please spend the week praying and asking God to help you discern the three men most qualified to serve.
- Then, come back next Sunday, the 19<sup>th</sup>, or the one after that, the 26<sup>th</sup>, prepared to nominate those three men to serve as elders over the coming year. We're relying on the honour system here. We're not saying you should vote twice. We're simply acknowledging that you may have to miss next Sunday and we're giving the body two weeks in which to turn in nominations.
- Now let me be clear what we're not asking you to do. In the past when we've asked for elder nominations from the body, we've encouraged you to go to the person you have in mind and ask them permission before you offered their name. This time we're asking you NOT to do that. We're asking you NOT to talk about your choices. Please pray and then please nominate the men God puts on your heart without regard to other circumstances.
- After our next elders' meeting we will prayerfully approach the ones receiving the largest number of nominations to find out if they are otherwise qualified and if they are willing to serve. All this will be done in strictest confidence. Hopefully no one will know anything other than that at our May business meeting we will present two or three qualified men

for a final affirmation by the congregation.

Let me tell you a true story that hopefully will explain what we're aiming for. In 2003 I was asked to serve as the intentional interim pastor at Sturgeon Valley Baptist Church in St. Albert, a bedroom community just north of Edmonton. The church there had become so divided over a particular issue that there was serious talk of dissolving the fellowship altogether. Instead, they brought in a consultant for troubled churches, Jim van Yperen, who helped the church identify the root causes of its troubles and then mapped out a plan that would lead toward healing and restoration.

Jim suggested the elders had become dysfunctional and should resign. He then brought in a team of trained volunteers who interviewed about 150 members for anywhere from a half-hour to an hour, seeking to get to the root causes of the church's troubles. At each interview the last question was, "Apart from the elders who resigned, who do you most trust to lead the church through the recovery period?" Jim took the top seven vote-getters, and these became the "Servant Team" that, along with myself and three mature Christians from three other churches, led the church through the next two-and-a-half years of recovery.

Here is what should be of interest to us Hawkwoodlums. These seven did a fantastic job. They really were the cream of the crop. After serving at the church for about two years I remember saying to Jeanne how wise the membership had been in the choices they made. "In fact," I said, "Now that we've gotten to know the membership, if I were asked to choose the servant team myself I would choose the same seven people."

As elders, we're hoping to see God do the same thing here. We are praying, and we hope you will join us in praying, that God will guide the church to know His will and that there will be a clear selection, that two or three men will stand out and that when called upon they will be willing to serve. It seems to us that if we are able to go to someone and say, "You were the spontaneous choice of a significant plurality of our membership," it ought to sound to them like the voice of God.

### **Today's text**

Now let's turn to today's text, and as we study it, my prayer is that God will help us grasp the unbelievably important work elders do and how much a church depends on a functional board of elders for its spiritual health.

**Acts 14:21** After they had evangelized that town and made many disciples (Derbe, v.20), they returned to Lystra, to Iconium, and to Antioch, 22 strengthening the disciples by encouraging them to continue in the faith and by telling them, "It is necessary to pass through many troubles on our way into the kingdom of God."

23 When they had appointed elders in every church and prayed with fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. 24 Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. 25 After they spoke the message in Perga, they went down to Attalia. 26 From there they sailed back to Antioch where they had been entrusted to the grace of God for the work they

had now completed. 27 After they arrived and gathered the church together, they reported everything God had done with them and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. 28 And they spent a considerable time with the disciples.

1. In this passage we find Paul and Barnabas at the turn around point on the world's first missionary journey. (see map)
  - a. From Derbe they went back through Lystra, Iconium and Antioch for the particular purpose of strengthening and encouraging the new disciples to continue in their new faith.
  - b. Strangely enough, their "encouragement" consisted of telling these new disciples, these baby Christians, that it would be "necessary to pass through many troubles" on their way into the kingdom of God.
    - i. Notice these evangelists offered a "reality based" view of the Christian faith.
      - (1) Reality recognizes that the Christian life is filled with many troubles, often specifically because we are striving to live the Christian life.
        - (a) There are the troubles of denying ourselves daily.
        - (b) For Paul and Barnabas, and their new believers there was always the trouble of physical persecution which they faced everywhere they went.
        - (c) For Christians there are still many external battles to face, including the concentrated efforts of various Canadian governments, first to eliminate Christianity from the public square, and second, to remove parents' influence over what their children are taught, or how they are raised.
      - (2) Reality also recognizes that the reward of entering the kingdom of God makes it worthwhile to endure all the troubles.
        - (a) Some of those rewards have to do with judgment day.
        - (b) Some of those rewards are specifically related to living a faithful Christian life in the face of persecution. Listen to what God gave the Christians in the midst of horrible times.

Acts 13:52 And the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

- (c) Note again that this reality-based faith was preached to baby Christians. But they were born again, and one thing you can count on, from the beginning of their new life in Christ, born-again children of God carry within them the ability to thrive in the face of difficulties.
- ii. This was the life Paul and Barnabas were living on this first missionary journey.
  - (1) Cyprus — plagued with a demon-possessed sorcerer (Acts 13:1-12)
  - (2) Antioch — publicly insulted and expelled from the district (Acts 13:13-50)
  - (3) Iconium — an attempt was made to assault them and stone them (Acts 14:1-6)
  - (4) Lystra — Paul was stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19)
- iii. This is not the gospel of Joel Osteen, T. D. Jakes, Creflo Dollar, Paula White, John Hagee, or any of the "word of faith" or "positive confession" prosperity preachers.
- iv. Instead, what we read in Acts 14 is the gospel of God, the gospel of the Bible, the

gospel that saves.

2. In turning around and heading for home, Paul and Barnabas faced the question of who, in their absence, would encourage the disciples. Who would strengthen them, and who would help them stand firm in the face of persecution?
  - a. As they passed back through the cities where they had preached the gospel they “appointed elders in every church.”
    - i. This was not a new idea; every Jewish synagogue in the world was led by local elders, and there is no doubt that parallels between church and synagogue existed then, and now.
    - ii. The word for “appointed” is quite interesting in that it includes the showing of hands, as in a vote, followed by the approval of the apostles. It appears that from earliest days the churches were led by local men approved by the local congregation, but also held to universal standards as represented by the apostles.
    - iii. Having prayed with the church and fasted before the Lord, and having appointed elders to provide leadership, Paul and Barnabas were then able to commit the churches to the Lord. (commit: think of depositing money in a bank.) They were the Lord’s in the first place, and now that the basic eldership structure was in place, the two church planters could trust that the Lord would take care of His church.
  - b. They trusted that the elders would be used of God to . . . (the following points are taken from Acts 20:17-38)
    - i. Carry on in the apostles’ manner of life and teaching.
    - ii. Maintain the purity of the gospel.
    - iii. Keep their eye on the big picture of what God is doing in the world and how the church fits into that big picture (see Acts 20:27 – “the whole plan of God”).
    - iv. Shepherd the church.
    - v. Guard the flock against the wolves that would destroy it.
    - vi. defend against false doctrine.
    - vii. maintain the teaching ministry of the church

## **Conclusion**

Now do you see why a vital elder ministry in our day is more important than ever?