

## FRIDAY 22 July 2022 "Barnabas to Antioch" (Acts 11:21-25)

Good morning my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

As you listen to news from far away do you sometimes have a desire to go and see for yourself, to become part of what you have heard reports about? Because I at one time lived not far from New York City, when I heard reports of the horrible news of 9/11, I felt drawn to go and see 'ground zero' for myself, and I did, several weeks after that tragedy. I did the same a few months after the devastating earthquake which nearly destroyed Port-au-Prince, Haiti about a decade ago, because I grew up in that city.

In our journey with the apostles in the historical account of the books of Acts, we spent yesterday in the city of Antioch, Syria as a remarkable spiritual movement was happening there about 2000 years ago. Antioch was a very large, multicultural city and this one statement summarizes an exciting time there: ***"The Lord's hand was with them and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord Jesus Christ."*** (Acts 11:21) *The Jesus movement which had launched in Jerusalem and spread to Samaria and then Damascus and then Caesarea was now powerfully impacting Antioch, Syria!*

News of dramatic things always spread quickly, everywhere in the world, in every era, by whatever means news travels fastest, and that was happening in Antioch. The record says: ***"News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch."*** I presume those referred to as 'they' who sent Barnabas are the apostles of Jesus, most of whom were still in Jerusalem trying to manage this ever-widening Jesus movement spreading out from Jerusalem across the entire region of Palestine. Do you remember Mr. Barnabas? We met him first in Acts 4:36. His birth name is Joseph and he's a Levite, a Jewish Jesus follower who is a man of great encouragement and generosity. That's why he's called "**Barnabas**". He's also a courageous man and a peacemaker as we saw in Acts 9:27 when Saul, the Pharisee who had been persecuting the Jesus followers in Jerusalem, had his life changing encounter with Jesus on his way to Damascus, and then when he returned to Jerusalem he was shunned by both Jewish leaders and Jesus followers. *It was Barnabas who took the initiative to go and meet with Saul to see for himself if his reported transformation was authentic. And then Barnabas brought Saul to the apostles, urging them to trust Saul.*

So, I can understand why Barnabas is their selected ambassador to go investigate the outrageous reports coming to Jerusalem from Antioch. They trusted his wisdom, his integrity, his gift of discernment. These apostles were Jewish men who had been with Jesus, and they were now the men Jesus had commissioned to teach what He had taught them as the Holy Spirit led them to spread the story of what they had experienced with Jesus. Doing so with fellow Jews in Jerusalem and in the provinces of Judea and Galilee was what they were prepared to focus their lives on.

But Jewish leaders had arrested them, imprisoned them, even flogged them in their wholesale rejection of Jesus. But Jesus had promised **"I will build My church..."** (Matt. 16:18) and He had promised His disciples **"The Holy Spirit will come upon you in POWER, and you will be MY witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth."** (Acts 1:8) Thousands of Jerusalem Jews had trusted in Jesus as they listened to the apostles, but persecution from the Jewish leaders scattered them from Jerusalem to other towns, evidently including Antioch, Syria. *The apostles had heard what the Holy Spirit did through Philip in Samaria, and through Peter in Lydda, Joppa and most of all Caesarea, so now they were very anxious to hear an accurate report from someone they trusted, about what was going on in Antioch!*

Antioch, Syria was more than 400 miles north of Jerusalem. The record says: **"When Barnabas arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord Jesus with all their hearts. Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord Jesus."** (Acts 11:23,24)

Remember friends, Antioch is a big, bustling, multiethnic and multicultural city. So, in such an environment, *what do you suppose Barnabas saw and experienced* that was for him **'the evidence of the grace of God...'**? Do you remember with the Samaritans there was 'great joy in their city' as a result of Philip coming there and sharing Jesus with them according to Acts 8:8? In Joppa, after God raised Tabitha from the dead through Peter's prayer and faith, there was great joy in that city, according to Acts 10:42! In Jerusalem after the healing of the crippled man people were filled with wonder and amazement and praised God, according to Acts 3:9,10. And of course we remember the description in Acts 2:42-47 of what was happening in Jerusalem as 3000 people trusted in Jesus and were baptized after the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost and Peter explained what God was doing!

*Maybe Barnabas saw some of all of these amazing things. Miracles, great joy, people sharing what they had with the poor in great generosity, and of course lives transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit!!*

Don't you love that one-line description of Barnabas? **'Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith'...** Twelve words, but oh my how powerful are those 12 words? I wonder what would be a very short, one phrase description of each of us my friends, you and me, all of us who are the "Walking with Jesus" family all around the world? I doubt Barnabas had ever been in Antioch before but clearly, he joined right in with the great Jesus movement in that city and encouraged the people in their pursuit of knowing Jesus. Did you notice the phrase Dr. Luke gives us which summarizes the result, the impact of Barnabas on the spiritual momentum in Antioch? **"...and a great number of people were brought to the Lord Jesus."**

I imagine Barnabas was asked to share in Antioch what Jesus was doing in other places, and so he likely told the story of Philip and the great joy in Samaria, and Philip and the Ethiopian African official, and Peter in Lydda and Joppa and especially Caesarea. Oh, my Barnabas had so much to share about what the Holy Spirit was doing in so many places. *But Barnabas had come to Antioch to learn, and so I imagine day and night he went from house to house, wherever these Antioch Jesus followers gathered, asking so many questions and watching as people from all over the world who were in Antioch on business, were first hearing of Jesus and trusting their lives to Jesus and experiencing the Holy Spirit!*

We don't know how long Barnabas stayed in Antioch, but Luke tells us something very significant happened: **"Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found Saul, Barnabas brought Saul back to Antioch!"** (Acts 11:25) Clearly the spiritual momentum in Antioch was significant and all these new believers in Jesus needed help! Remember the Gospels had not yet been written and so what they were learning about Jesus was being taught to them by those who had learned it from the apostles! You'll recall Saul was in his hometown of Tarsus, having been run out of Jerusalem by the religious leaders who rejected his passionate teaching that Jesus is in fact the Messiah. Tarsus was geographically much closer to Antioch than Jerusalem, but I wonder, did Barnabas go recruiting Saul only because it was a shorter walk, or *do you suppose Barnabas knew that even though the Holy Spirit was powerfully at work among Samaritans in Samaria and Gentiles in Caesarea, still the Jewish apostle Jesus followers were really struggling accepting this notion of non-Jews being saved by God as they trusted in Jesus?*

We can presume many if not most of these new Jesus followers in Antioch were NOT Jews, they were Gentiles, and many of them NOT from Antioch, but they were traders traveling through with their caravans. Barnabas needed someone who could teach them about Jesus effectively and efficiently for many of them would only have days or at the most weeks in Antioch before they would continue on in their travels. *So, Barnabas when on a recruitment trip to Tarsus, looking for the only man he knew who could most effectively fuel this spiritual movement in Antioch into a full-blown revival!* Can you imagine what Barnabas said to Saul to convince him to come and join him in Antioch? Tomorrow we'll look at what happened next.

Let's pause right here and consider this for today: How similar or different are you from Barnabas? If a spiritual revival broke out in your city, what part do you suppose God might lead you to have in that fresh movement of the Holy Spirit?

**Today's Scripture is Acts 11:21-25.**