

WEEKEND Edition 23/24 July 2022 "Christians!" (Acts 11:25,26 & 1 Corinthians 2)

Hello, my "Walking with Jesus" friends... hey, it's the weekend and I hope you have a great one, wherever you are in the world.

TIME is one of the greatest gifts you and I receive every day from God, would you agree? You can't buy time, but you spend it every moment. You can't stretch time or multiply it or shrink it, but you sure can waste time, right? For just a moment think back, one year ago to this weekend, 2021. *Where were you, what was going on in your life one year ago this weekend?* Yesterday I left you with Barnabas on his way from the city of Antioch to Tarsus, about 2000 years ago. A great spiritual revival was happening in Antioch and Barnabas knew the Jesus followers there needed help in understanding this spiritual transformation they were experiencing. Tarsus was only about 100 miles from Antioch, as compared to more than 400 miles back to Jerusalem. *But also, Barnabas didn't know anyone more intelligent in the Scriptures or more passionate about Jesus than Saul, so from Barnabas' perspective, the best place for Saul was Antioch.*

Acts 11:26 says, **"Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when Barnabas found him, he brought him to Antioch. So, for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people."** That's why I asked you about this past year in your life? May I ask a pointed question: *'What difference has your life made in our world during this past year? Who have you helped? How have you contributed to the improvement of wherever you live?'* *Are those fair questions for each of us to ask ourselves EVERY year?*

In Antioch, people from all over the world were passing through on business, for it was a major crossroads of international trade. It was also an educational center, so people stayed a while and studied with great teachers there. Therefore, the news of Jesus was spreading quickly in this large city, *but the apostles, who knew Jesus personally were all in Jerusalem, 400 miles away! You see the problem, don't you?* Matthew and John were only beginning to write their Gospel accounts of Jesus, so the personal stories **told** by the apostles and their **personal teaching** of what Jesus had taught them was only passed verbally from person to person. Details were already starting to change as the Jesus stories passed to the third and fourth generation tellers of those stories. *Accuracy was floundering in Antioch and other such places where the apostles had not yet visited.* Do you see why Saul, with his almost limitless knowledge of Old Testament Scriptures and the Rabbinical writings, as well as his several months now of direct teaching from the Holy Spirit, could be very significant in foundational, accurate, truthful teaching and debate in Antioch? We can presume Barnabas began calling the people together very regularly to hear Saul teach, and from the first day people heard Saul teach, we can assume word spread quickly that a new professor was in town who was perhaps the best teacher the people had ever heard!

Now friends, it's important we understand *there was a miracle of learning going on in Antioch*. I'm sure you remember back to your school days, or anytime you have put your mind to learning something new. There's a very special, miraculous dynamic which occurs in learning, isn't there? **First** the teacher communicates truth in a clear way, so the student hears something he or she has not heard before in an understandable way. But **second**, the student listens intently to hear accurately and seek to understand new concepts clearly. But my friends here's where the miracle happens when we are learning spiritual truth: *the Holy Spirit of God has as part of His role in our lives, the privilege and responsibility to help our brains understand spiritual truth that is ONLY understandable with God's help.*

Remember on the night before His crucifixion, in the upper room when they were together for one final night of teaching, Jesus had said to His disciples: ***"The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." (John 14:26)*** ***"When He, the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13)*** ***...the Spirit will receive from Me what He will make known to you." (John 16:15)*** Now, here's an important question for all of us: *'Was Jesus promising this experience ONLY for those disciples present with Him that evening in the upper room? Or is this God's desire for EVERY person, man or woman, from anywhere in the world, in every generation, who trusts in Jesus Christ for their Salvation and experiences the regeneration work of the Holy Spirit in their lives? Answer: this is God's intention for EVERY follower of Jesus Christ!*

Some years later this Saul, then known as Paul, wrote to the Jesus followers in Corinth and explained this miracle of learning spiritual truths: ***"...The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. These are the things God has revealed to us by His Spirit... no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God... We have received the Spirit of God so that we may understand what God has freely given us... The person without the Spirit of God does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness and cannot understand them because they are discerned ONLY through the Holy Spirit of God..." (1 Corinthians 2:10-14)*** This is the miracle of spiritual teaching and learning which Saul and Barnabas were fully engaged with in Antioch! Every day, every evening, people came to listen and learn. *The Spirit of God opened their minds to learn, and then applied into their hearts and lives the spiritual truths Barnabas and Saul were teaching them.* It was like spring rains falling on fields which had been plowed and planted. All over Antioch new believers in Jesus were growing in their spiritual understanding of their relationship with Jesus and the deep, inner, life transforming work of the Holy Spirit within them as they were being transformed by God from pagans to followers of Jesus. It was an exciting time to be alive in the city of Antioch, Syria about the year 40ad!

I think it's safe to say most if not all of these new believers in Jesus had never met Jesus personally, never heard Him speak or watched Him do a miracle, and also most of them had never met any of the disciple/apostles!

So, in that way they were just like you and me... and yet the Holy Spirit was turning Antioch upside down as these believers in Jesus learned and were empowered and transformed by the Holy Spirit. How do I know these transformed people were impacting Antioch? Look at what happened next in Antioch as recorded in Acts 11:26 **"The followers of Jesus were called 'Christians' first at Antioch!"** It's not difficult for us to imagine or understand this is it, my friends?

People were experiencing dramatic changes in their lives. Liars repented and learned to only speak truthfully. Angry people repented and the Holy Spirit turned them into gentle, compassionate people. Dishonest people changed and were always and only honest. Procrastinators became self-motivated, in fact proactive people! While it hadn't been written yet, this is what Antioch Jesus followers were like: **"The fruit of the Holy Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."** (Gal. 5:22,23) There was such similarity among these people who were learning from Barnabas and Saul, that the people of Antioch noticed and found a new way to refer to these changed people: **CHRISTIANS.** *It means "people like Jesus" or "Jesus people".*

Now let's pause here and ponder what we've experienced this historic day. *Do you have an almost insatiable appetite for the Holy Spirit to teach you truths that only a Spirit led heart and mind can understand?* Do you see the evidence in your life that the Holy Spirit is helping you learn, are you learning to think like Jesus? Is your life so radically like Jesus that people notice? Have you ever had someone who doesn't know you, after they've spent only a short time with you, asked you if you are a Christian, a follower of Jesus?

I invite us all to talk with the Holy Spirit right now about these things in our lives. And here's a song to help us reflect on how much or how little we are like Jesus!

Today's Scripture is Acts 11:25-26; 1 Corinthians 2.