

FRIDAY 12 August 2022 "Restored" (Acts 14:19,20)

Good morning my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

Have you found yourself in a crisis situation where you felt totally helpless? Perhaps you came upon an accident scene with blood flowing, and you have no medical training, and you didn't know the people involved, so you felt helpless. Let's rejoin that scene, where I left you yesterday, outside the town of Lystra.

The bleeding man on the ground is the passionate evangelist known as the apostle Paul. The year is about 46ad. The man kneeling on the ground attending to Paul, trying to discern if he's alive or dead, is Barnabas, Paul's fellow evangelist and traveling companion. They've only been here in Lystra a few days at most. They're on a journey which began a few months before in Syrian Antioch. We have been following the log record of their journey found in Acts 13 & 14. *These two men believe they are on a God called, God commissioned, God led journey. This was not their idea nor their choice.* They responded affirmatively and willingly to the call of the Holy Spirit of God during a worship service in which they sensed a strong word from the Holy Spirit saying: **"Set apart for ME Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."** (Acts 13:2) Their fellow leaders of the Jesus movement in Antioch prayed, seeking confirmation from the Holy Spirit, and then commissioned Saul and Barnabas to this journey.

They began on the Island of Cyprus, Barnabas' homeland, taking with them young John Mark as their helper. Remarkable things happened there as many believed in the story and message of Jesus, and a sorcerer who tried to oppose them was struck blind by the power of the Holy Spirit in Saul. Then is when Saul changed his name to Paul. (Acts 13:9) From there they sailed north into the mainland, where John Mark left them to return home to Jerusalem and they hiked 100 miles to Pisidian Antioch where again God did a remarkable work in the lives of many people who believed the message Paul and Barnabas brought called the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But jealousy arose and a crowd was riled up and ran Paul and Barnabas out of town, so they hiked to the next town Iconium and much the same happened there. Now they've come to Lystra, only about 25 miles from Iconium, but here it's quite different. *Because of an ancient myth believed by the people and Paul's miraculous healing of a man lame from birth, the people suddenly crowded around Paul and Barnabas* proclaiming them to be **"...the gods who have come down to us in human form."** (Acts 14:11) We can only imagine the celebration!

But this celebrating crowd soon turned out to be an out-of-control mob, due to some who strongly opposed the Gospel Paul was proclaiming and that mob picked up stones, threw them at Paul and now here we stand, outside the city with Paul's bleeding and badly bruised body lying on the ground in front of us! A small group of Christians are

standing around, and Barnabas is kneeling beside Paul. Is he dead? What should we do?

I wonder how quickly you turn to prayer when faced with a challenging situation, especially a crisis? There's an important lesson for us here in this critical moment outside Lystra. If a modern doctor had been standing there he might have said *'this man is in critical condition. Seconds count right now; he needs a miracle.'* Now remember, they are outside a town which has just rejected them and stoned them and dragged Paul along the ground outside of town leaving him for dead! No medical help is available. No bandages, nothing to put on his wounds to stop the bleeding or prevent infection. **They have only ONE resource available... Prayer!** Luke doesn't give us the details, but I imagine it was Barnabas who said to the little group something like this: *"There is only one thing we can do. Pray, each of us, all of us, asking God to do the miracle only HE can do, and raise up our friend Paul from near death... right here, right now, for God's glory, let's pray in great faith believing Jesus wants this work of proclaiming the Gospel to continue."*

Luke's record says: **"But after the disciples had gathered around Paul, he got up and went back into the city!"** (Acts 14:20) What?? What happened here? Come on Luke, give us lots more detail than that! This may be one of the most significant moments in the first years after Jesus has returned to heaven and entrusted the spread of His Gospel message to His apostles and friends, and Luke, that's all you want to tell us about how this miracle happened??

It's important we remember my friends, the Bible is a God authored book, written by the hands of men but they were only scribes. They wrote what the Holy Spirit of God led them to write... no more and no less, according to 2 Peter 1:20,21. *So evidently, we have all God wants us to know about this specific, amazing, remarkable, miraculous moment in history!* Paul was radically, remarkably, miraculously healed from the damage of the rocks thrown at him. But what happened next is vital for us to understand. Did you notice it? Paul stood to his feet, brushed himself off, looked around at those standing there with him and at that moment he had a huge decision to make. **Run; rally** a group of people to take revenge on those who had hurt him; **or... Look** at what the record tells us: **"...he got up and went back into the city."** Now we know Paul and Barnabas were constantly, every day, trying to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit on this adventurous trip. So, I think what happened here was this...

As Paul awakened from his unconsciousness, he first rolled over to see those standing around him. They quickly asked him questions about where he was hurt, could he stand etc. The bleeding wounds stopped bleeding. If there were any broken ribs or bones or cracks in his skull, they were instantly repaired, healed, by the power of Jesus, without any human touch. Slowly Paul rose to his feet, brushed himself off, and said to the group something like: *'well, I hurt everywhere, but I think I'm OK. I'm not bleeding, nothing seems to be broken, I think God has restored my life! Praise You Jesus, thank you Jesus, now, Lord Jesus, what do you want me to do?'*

After a few seconds of silence, I can hear those voices around him starting to offer their suggestions... *"Paul, you are fortunate to be alive, let's get you out of here..."* and other similar suggestions. But Paul just stood there, looking into the faces of Barnabas and all those around him who cared so deeply for him. Then Paul looked at the city walls of Lystra, the city gate, the people going about their business as normal inside the city of Lystra. Then he turned and looked down the road leading away from Lystra, and I imagine everyone around him was nodding and saying *'YES, go that way Paul, leave this place'!!*

But then look, Paul is taking Barnabas by the arm. *"We can't leave Lystra Barnabas, not yet. These people need to know the power of the one true God we serve and the love of our Lord Jesus for this city. We must go back and show them I am alive and tell them again the truth... we serve the only living, true, Almighty God and that God loves them so much Jesus died for them, and they can be saved from their sin and live in a vibrant, wonderful relationship with Jesus as you and I are."*

I've often wondered what happened in Lystra that day as Paul and Barnabas, and this little group who had witnessed this miracle healing of Paul, walked back into the city of Lystra?? Paul was smiling, not bleeding and angry. He was walking boldly, upright, not bent over and broken. *How long did it take for a crowd to gather around Paul and Barnabas demanding an explanation of now a second, great, unexplainable miracle standing right in front of them?* Did the healed crippled man come running up to resurrected Paul and his friends and start shouting and celebrating? How many people trusted in Jesus that day in Lystra?

The story in Acts gives us no details, nothing. We know they stayed only one more day before leaving Lystra for Derbe. If they had stayed a few days longer, I wonder what would have happened? We don't know how many people trusted in Jesus. We only know after a little while Paul and Barnabas walked out of Lystra and headed down the road to the next town Derbe. But this time they were not run out of town, nor were they being chased by a stone throwing crowd. *This time they walked away from Lystra victorious and confident the Holy Spirit had powerfully worked in that town and would do even more in the next town!* Are you and I living our lives today with that same power of the Holy Spirit in us my friends? Let's walk along with them, and here's a song they might have been singing, if it had been written in their day...

Today's Scripture is Acts 14:19, 20.