

MONDAY 08 August 2022 "Iconium Welcome" (Acts 14:1-3)

Good Monday morning to you my 'Walking with Jesus' friends,

As you begin a new work week today, I wonder what is on your agenda for this week? In the part of the world where I live, this week public schools re-open for the fall semester so millions of families will adjust to a new daily routine and thousands of teachers head back into their classrooms this week. I wonder what new challenges you'll face in these next few days, and are you ready?

This weekend I left you walking down the road with Paul and Barnabas. Behind them were the remarkable experiences they'd had during the few weeks they'd spent in the city of Antioch in the region of Pisidia which is located in the modern country of Turkey. While many people had received them well and even accepted and believed their message about Jesus, many city and Jewish leaders had stirred up that town against them, so the Holy Spirit led Paul and Barnabas to leave Pisidian Antioch rather than fight, heading east toward other cities. Let's please remember these two courageous adventurers were not following a prearranged travel plan. As far as we know neither man had ever been in this part of the world before. *Daily they were depending on the Holy Spirit of God to lead them on their journey.*

I'm really amazed by such courageous and practical faith. Paul and Barnabas had been selected by the Holy Spirit during a worship service a few months before, back in the great city of Syrian Antioch. Remember we saw that in Acts 13:1,2? The other leaders of that exciting group of Jesus followers, with whom they had been working for more than a year, had agreed with their sense of God's call and they had sent them off to follow the Holy Spirit in what He described as **"the work to which I have called them."** (Acts 13:2) *Few things fascinate me more than watching a person seek to live every day, make every decision every day, in total obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit of God in their life!* Some might call that mystical. I call it miraculous!

That a person can discern the guidance of God by the Holy Spirit living within them, and then make daily choices that enable that person to DO what they sense the Holy Spirit is leading them to do. Now for most people that means they still go home at night, they eat a meal at their table, sleep in their own bed that night, and wake up the next morning surrounded by familiar friends and family and attempt to again discern the leading of the Spirit for that day. May I ask... do you live like that?

But for Paul and Barnabas, their adventure of following the Holy Spirit's leading in their lives was at a whole different level. If Syrian Antioch was their most recent 'home' for them, because that was where they had spent more than a year working with the Christians in that town... that 'home' was more than 700 miles away!

Every day, for the past several months, they had been traveling one step at a time, fully dependent on discerning where the Holy Spirit was leading them to go and what He was leading them to say and do! On this particular day, as Paul and Barnabas walked the dusty road going east from Pisidian Antioch, I'm not sure they knew a definitive destination. Luke, the writer of their story, records for us: **"Paul and Barnabas shook the dust of Pisidian Antioch off their feet and went to Iconium."** (Acts 13:51) That action of shaking the dust off their sandals was the symbolic way of saying to those people urging them to leave their city, that they were leaving the results and consequences of their forced departure to those sending them out of the city. As they walked, we have no record of what they talked about but I'm sure they spent several miles discussing what had happened to them in Pisidian Antioch over the few weeks they were in that city. *They were confident the Holy Spirit had led them there... but why? What results had they seen, what impact had they made? What had the Holy Spirit done to confirm Paul and Barnabas had discerned His leading correctly and were doing exactly what the Holy Spirit wanted them to do?*

Luke summarizes their impact in Pisidian Antioch this way: **"The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit."** (Acts 13:52) As we discussed yesterday, those 'disciples' were the people, both Jews and Gentiles, in Pisidian Antioch who had trusted fully in what Paul and Barnabas had told them about Jesus and they had experienced new life in Christ. *They were now the joy filled, Holy Spirit filled, Jesus followers in the city of Pisidian Antioch.* Paul and Barnabas knew, even if they would never again visit that city, that city was now changed forever because joyful, Holy Spirit filled Jesus followers lived in that city! They also knew the truth of Jesus had been boldly proclaimed during their weeks in Pisidian Antioch, and the Holy Spirit would continue working in those people helping them to understand and take action on the truths of Jesus which they had heard. I think Paul and Barnabas smiled as they walked down the road, leaving Pisidian Antioch behind them. I think they prayed as they walked, and possibly sang, thanking Jesus for the privilege of having been His representatives to the people of that city for those weeks. That had been time well spent and many people in that place now had heaven as their eternal destiny!

My friends, as I mentioned, teachers and families where I live are this week ending their summer and returning to school. Like Paul and Barnabas, they have the opportunity to reflect on all they did during the summer and the places they went. I wonder how many are asking the deeper questions of life like these:

** 'So what was the most significant part of my summer and how will summer '22 affect the rest of my life?'*

** 'Who most influenced my life this summer? How am I different as a result of their influence?'*

** 'Who did my life influence this summer? How are their lives different because my life touched them?'*

Are you and I courageous enough to ask those questions of ourselves every few months?

It appears to me the Holy Spirit led Paul and Barnabas to set their sights on the city of Iconium about 200 miles east, down the descending hill country from the highlands of Pisidian Antioch. It would have taken several days. Plenty of time to think, talk, pray and try to make a plan for what they could discern the Holy Spirit wanted to do in that city through them. As far as I know neither man had ever been to Iconium before, nor did they know anyone in that city. Can you put yourself in their sandals as they walk toward a city they've never seen? Luke gives us this record: ***"At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish Synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed."*** (Acts 14:1) Now maybe you are thinking, how could that happen? Well both Paul and Barnabas were Jews, with very strong Jewish family heritage. Paul was of the tribe of Benjamin, and you'll recall a former Pharisee. The Synagogue in any city would be the place he would feel at home, most comfortable. Barnabas was a Levite, so he too would feel very comfortable, welcomed in any Synagogue. And as we saw in Pisidian Antioch, *Jewish visitors were always welcome in any Synagogue and usually after the reading of the Scriptures the visitors would be invited to share a greeting and any insight, they might have on the Scripture which had been read.* What a wonderful tradition and a perfect opportunity for Paul and Barnabas to share who they were and some words about Jesus!

Are you amazed that a great number of people believed in their words, and we presume that means they trusted in Jesus to be their Messiah and their Savior!? But I'm confident Paul and Barnabas were also on the lookout for those who would not be so welcoming, and sure enough Luke tells us: ***"But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the other Gentiles and poisoned their minds against Paul and Barnabas. So, Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time in Iconium, speaking boldly for the Lord Jesus, who confirmed the message of His grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders."*** (Acts 14:2,3) Remember the jealousy problem back in Pisidian Antioch? It happened here, again in Iconium, as jealousy again turned to opposition and confrontation as people were '**stirred up**'. I don't exactly know how long "**considerable time**" was for Paul and Barnabas to remain in Iconium, but I presume several weeks. They didn't waste their time, and do you notice the powerful statement: ***"speaking boldly for the Lord Jesus, who confirmed the message of His grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders."***?

This description tells me that by the time Paul and Barnabas had walked those 200 miles, they had a plan and they had energy and passion and went right to work. They expected and saw opposition, but it didn't deter them. *As they shared Jesus with people, they watched to see any evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in Iconium.* What evidence? Well... anyone who understood the Gospel of Jesus which Paul and Barnabas spoke, was evidence that the Holy Spirit had opened their heart and mind to receive and understand this new spiritual truth.

Anyone who trusted in Jesus and His truth could only do so if the Holy Spirit enabled them to do it and convicted them of their sin and their need for a Savior! And it appears the Holy Spirit empowered Paul and Barnabas to do some miraculous things which Luke calls '**signs and wonders**'. Tomorrow we'll look more closely at these exciting things happening in Iconium. For today, let's look back a few months... consider, what has God been doing in your life, my friends, by asking yourself those questions I gave you a moment ago?

Today's Scripture is Acts 14:1-3.