

WEEKEND Edition 13/14 August "Revisit?" (Acts 14:21,22)

Hello, my "Walking with Jesus" friends and welcome to the Weekend wherever you are around the world!

Have you ever had the opportunity to go back and visit a place which was very significant to you in the past? What was that like for you? Let's join one of those experiences right now...

We're traveling with Paul and Barnabas on their first journey together and if you've been with us each day, it has been a remarkable, very eventful journey, hasn't it? Yesterday I left you with Paul and Barnabas going BACK into the town of Lystra after a miracle resurrection! *Paul had been stoned... I mean showered by an avalanche of rocks thrown at him by some angry people in Lystra. He'd been dragged out of Lystra and left lying on the side of the road, bleeding profusely and presumed dead or at least dying!*

Yesterday we witnessed a remarkable miracle. Paul was amazingly healed and raised to vibrant health by the power of God. Rather than running AWAY from Lystra or seeking to rally a group to go with him back into Lystra and tear that town apart in RETALIATION for what they had done to him, the Biblical record tells us this: ***"...after the disciples had gathered around Paul, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe."*** (Acts 14:20) We have no more details than that! And yesterday I left you walking away from Lystra toward Derbe with Paul and Barnabas! I'm glad we don't have too many more details; it leaves us wondering what great things God did in the days following Paul's stoning and resurrection healing in Lystra. One thing we can be sure of, no one who had witnessed it, ever forgot it!

The record says: ***"They preached the good news [the Gospel of Jesus Christ] in that city and won a large number of disciples."*** (Acts 14:21) Derbe would have been about 50 or 60 miles from Lystra, depending on the road they took. Once again, we assume Paul and Barnabas knew no one there and had never been to Derbe before. It seems clear they found a more receptive response among the people in Derbe, although we have no details about their time there. We don't know exactly how long they were in Derbe or where they stayed or how many times, they proclaimed the story of Jesus. We don't know the names or ages or gender of the people who responded. We only know one thing: ***"...they won a large number of disciples in that town."*** Once again may I point out the difference between the words "believer" and "disciple"? **Believers** were then, as they are now, people who believe the truth of Jesus and may trust Him to be their Savior. But **'disciple'** is a whole different matter. Those are believers in Jesus who want to pursue an authentic, growing, life changing relationship with Jesus.

Disciples not only want to know all the truth about Jesus, and the truth Jesus taught, they want to experience the powerful work of Jesus in their lives, by the power of the Holy Spirit alive in them! In fact, they want to BECOME more and more like Jesus. That's why they're called 'disciples'.

So, with that explanation may I ask... *how would you characterize your relationship with the Gospel of Jesus and with Jesus Himself?* Are you a person who is interested in the Gospel message, and interested in learning about Jesus and possibly interested in a relationship with Jesus? Or are you a person who believes in the truth of the Gospel, the truth of Jesus, and you've trusted Jesus to be your Savior, and you are satisfied with that. *Or are you a 'disciple' and you are passionately pursuing KNOWING Jesus personally and powerfully experiencing His Holy Spirit very active in your life?* I hope our "Walking with Jesus" journey is drawing and challenging you to join with me in becoming a disciple of Jesus!

After a while in the town of Derbe, evidently the Holy Spirit of God once again led Paul and Barnabas to understand it was time to move on, but this time they needed to be very careful about which direction to go. Roads from Derbe led both south and east and one of them would have led them to Tarsus, Paul's hometown and where he had spent some extended time recently with the Holy Spirit teaching him this Gospel of Jesus he was proclaiming. It was there in Tarsus Barnabas had come to find Paul and invited him to join the Jesus movement in Syrian Antioch and teach the large number of disciples of Jesus there. You remember Paul did join Barnabas in Antioch and great things happened. *So great that the people of Antioch needed a new word to describe these disciples of Jesus and they started calling them "Christians" first in Antioch!* (Acts 11:26) I imagine Paul and Barnabas reminisced about that as they wondered which road the Holy Spirit would lead them to follow as they leave Derbe.

But it appears the very strong leading Paul and Barnabas received from the Holy Spirit was that they should RETURN to visit all the places they had been on this journey, starting with going back to Lystra! Oh my, can you imagine how much they prayed and discussed that idea? What would they encounter in each place that they return to? Paul had been stoned and left for dead in **Lystra**, what would happen when he and Barnabas walk back into Lystra now? Would they see that healed crippled man again? In Iconium they had first been well received and then a malicious group of people had spread false things about them, and they had been run out of town. How would the people of Iconium respond when they walked back into **Iconium** again? In Pisidian Antioch they had spent several weeks with wonderful spiritual results and some very special friendships were made, but once again jealous Jewish leaders had stirred up the people and run Paul and Barnabas out of town, so what reception should they anticipate if they returned to visit **Pisidian Antioch?**

Think back over your life my friends... all the places you've lived and worked and spent any amount of time. You've left an impact there... a reputation in each place.

Think for a moment about doing what Paul and Barnabas are about to do. Think about taking a trip back down the road of your life, revisiting each place you've ever lived, ever spent any amount of time. What would you anticipate would be the response of the people as you walk into that town or neighborhood or the places where you worked or the places which shape your memories?

Luke gives us one simple summary statement of what that 'return trip' was like for Paul and Barnabas: **"Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith."** (Acts 14:22) Oh I celebrate those words and the pictures that fill my heart and my mind as I imagine the experiences they must have had in each town as they revisited the people there. But then Luke adds this one statement which evidently Paul and Barnabas said in each town to the disciples of Jesus there: **"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God..."**

In each town that meant something specific and unique to that town and what Paul and Barnabas had experienced there. The scars and memories were very fresh, for those brutal experiences had been only a few weeks ago! Paul wanted those in each town who were on the discipleship journey with Jesus to understand... *this life of following Jesus would NOT be an easy life. Living here in this wicked world as a citizen of the kingdom of God would be a counterculture experience.* The clash in values of this evil world and God's kingdom were profound, absolute and deeply rooted in EVERY aspect of life... morals, ethics, marriage, family, business dealings, health care, education, entertainment, leadership, even religion and spirituality.

I want to pause right here this weekend my friends. We need to give this serious thought, no matter where you live in the world, no matter your age, your gender, your marital status, your family heritage, even your religious background. I urge you to take your journal, if you have one, and find some time this weekend to do some serious reflection and have a discussion with the Holy Spirit of God. Here are a few key questions I urge you to ponder...

1. What is your honest description of your relationship with Jesus Christ? Interested? Believer? Disciple? Former disciple who has drifted away?

2. What would happen if you journeyed the road of your life in reverse? What if you returned to all the key places of your life? How would you interact with who you had been when you were there in your past and who you are now? What reputation did you build when you were there in your past?

3. Depending on your relationship with Jesus, what does it mean for you to live counterculture in our evil infested world? What price are you paying for being a follower of Jesus?

I wonder what Jesus wants to speak into your heart and mind, and mine, about these important life questions? Oh, how God the Father loves you! Oh, my friends can you grasp how much Jesus the Savior loves you and wants to help you make your life count. And oh, how the Holy Spirit loves you and wants to guide you to live such a fulfilling Kingdom of God life! Here's a song to help you worship as you ponder today's important truths and questions:

Today's Scripture is Acts 14:21, 22.