

Retracing Their Steps.

Acts 14:21-28.

Sunday, February 6, 2011.

I. A return to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch (in Asia Minor).

- A. The first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas was a circular one. They started out from Antioch in Syria and headed west by boat to Cyprus. They crossed this island from east to west and headed north by boat to Perga on the coast of Asia Minor. From Perga they headed north through treacherous mountain terrain to Antioch in Asia Minor, and from there south-east to Iconium, Lystra and Derbe.
- B. By the time they got to Derbe they were about three quarters of the way around the circle, and well on their way back to their sending church in Antioch of Syria. The remainder of the road would lead over smooth, well-traveled, and for Paul familiar terrain, as the road would lead them through Tarsus, Paul's home town, back to Antioch.
- C. Paul and Barnabas decide not to do so however. They decide to travel back to Antioch in Syria the way they had come, visiting in particular those churches they had left behind in a hostile environment, which were the churches in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch.
- D. The decision to do so was one of great personal sacrifice. They gave up a relatively short and easy road back to Antioch in Syria in exchange for a long and difficult and dangerous road, going back the way they had come.
Why did they do so?

II. Reasons for going back.

- A. Going back to these dangerous cities, over dangerous and difficult, mountainous terrain, would communicate like nothing else the love and care and concern the apostles had for these young Christians. It would give them a devoted audience and an open door for the gospel like nothing else.
It would prove that they were not apostles for their own fame, glory and ease, but for the sake of the sheep of Christ, for whom He died. In short, it would greatly enhance the credibility and weightiness of their message. The message would sink in easier and deeper into the hearts of their hearers.
- B. The individual souls of these young believers needed strengthening.
 1. They exhorted them to continue in the faith in spite of many tribulations.
 2. "We must through many tribulations enter into the Kingdom of God."
Talk about brutal honesty! Up- front honesty! Why?
 - a. Because there is a presumption in the human heart that if we do the right thing, things will go well for us in this world.
A presumption furthermore, that if God loves us, things will go well for us in this world. Consequently, there is a tendency in our hearts to measure our blessedness, and the blessedness of others, (or the lack thereof) by how well we, or they, are faring in this world. Tribulation shatters that presumption.
 - b. There is a need to end the love-affair our hearts have with this world by nature, in order that our hearts may fall in love and embrace the Kingdom of God, and the world to come as its chief treasure.

Three entities died on the cross of Christ:

- The Lord Jesus Himself died in our place as the Lamb of God.
- Our old natures, old Adam, the flesh, is nailed to the cross with Christ, and although it has not quite expired yet, it is condemned to do so.
- This world is crucified with Christ, and although it yet stands, it is tottering and quaking and ready to be removed and to give way for the Kingdom that can not be shaken or moved. Hebrews 12:27-29.

Tribulation enables us to end our love affair with this world and to say our good-byes to it, and to give our hearts to the One who alone, and who's Kingdom alone, is worthy of our love.

- c. There is a need for believers to deal with the sinfulness and the corruption that remains in their hearts. Tribulation has a way of bringing all that to the surface so that we may deal with it.

In a furnace that refines gold or silver, all the impurities that are lighter than these precious metals (and are therefore unworthy of it), float to the surface, and are easily dealt with and removed. So is the refining furnace of tribulation. Tribulation tends to bring all the things unworthy of a Christian's life to the surface where they may be confessed and removed by the Holy Spirit who is the Chief Refiner.

- C. These young believers collectively, in their churches, needed to be established. To that end the apostles "ordained" or "appointed" them elders in every church.
 1. The word translated "ordained" or "appointed" means "to choose by a show of hands." It is the same word as we find in 2 Cor. 8:19 where it regards "the brother who was chosen by the churches" to travel with the apostles to Jerusalem to administer the gift collected for the needy Judean Christians.
 2. Seeing furthermore that this "ordaining or appointing" did take place in the context of fasting and prayer it would seem that the apostles did not act unilaterally but rather that they supervised the process leading to the ordination and installation of elders in every church.

III. They commended them to the Lord.

- A. Why did they not simply commend them to the Lord while they were in Derbe?
- B. Commending them to the Lord means that the apostles at this time take their leave of these Christians. They have done what they could. Now the burden of their care and safe-keeping is laid on the shoulders of "the Great Shepherd of the Sheep," the Lord Jesus Christ.
- C. The apostles could not do so until now. They couldn't because they were yoked together with Christ in the great work of calling out and shepherding Christ's flock. They had to carry their part of the yoke. Having done so they could safely leave the heavier end of the yoke in the Lord's hands.
- D. Do you struggle to know when to commend something to the lord? That is probably a good place to be.

IV. Back in Antioch.

- A. Finally back in Antioch the apostles report to the church "how God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles" (without becoming Jews first), and that comment sets the stage for what follows in Chapter 15.