BARNABAS REMEMBERS **see Acts 13, 14**

It was a joy to be with Paul as we preached the gospel, to see the ease with which he reached out, and the many who believed. He was so focused on wanting to share what he now knew about Jesus the Christ, the omnipresence and power of the one God, the importance of keeping thought in tune with all that God is. But it was not straightforward! As many as gratefully believed there were also those that were indeed violently against what we were doing and having sown the seeds with those who were indeed receptive, it was wise at times to move on. The Holy Ghost had directed me to partner Saul (as then called) when we were in Antioch. And what times we then had, - sailing to Cyprus, and there to Salamis and Paphos, - where Paul caused the evil sorcerer Elymas to be blinded, causing a blindness much like Paul must have experienced, but for far longer. While this was transformational for Paul, I didn't think this man will ever change. While Paul sought the Christ, this sorcerer no doubt just ruminated, and built up his bitterness. However, the pro-consul that he was close to saw what happened, and in awe believed what we had to say. And that seed certainly spread!

I marvelled that as we travelled, strangers in a gentile world, that we never lacked anything. Our reaching out with the Gospel was met with goodwill by most, but certainly not by all! We knew what we were doing was God-impelled and protected. I never thought I would travel so much, but being with Paul was such a joy, always learning, leaving people smiling – and many because they had been healed or had witnessed healing, - that was such a source of knowing we were active on God's mission of spreading the Gospel, - not called Good News for nothing!! On we went to Perga in Pamphylia and thence to Antioch, - what a city!! Paul's preaching was so effective, within a week the whole city had heard of the word of God, and it spread throughout the region . What a feeling that continued to give us! But the Jews stirred up their friends and contacts, and we were forced to leave. In true fashion we shook the dust of our feet, reaching Iconium.

Again our success was marred by the resentful Jews. The city was divided, but the threat to us was real. We knew we should leave, and did, fleeing this time to Lycaonia, - and there we reached the city of Lystra. Again we preached the gospel.

Paul had this knack of attracting people, - what might start as just a few could soon become a crowd, an informal chat would soon become a sermon! And I would be there, in full support, and as sometimes called upon, in sure witness of what Paul and others were achieving.

And this day in Lystra something special happened. Paul and I were talking to a small number of people, walking slowly along the roadway, talking of the power of the Christ, the presence of the kingdom of God within. At the side of the road a man was sitting with two friends. It was obvious he was a cripple, but he wasn't begging. They all looked at us, and we exchanged glances, and I felt his look was somehow a plea to help. Paul was speaking loudly as he normally did, and they had heard him speaking. My heart went out to him. One of his friends signalled to us, and said the poor man had been a cripple all his life, something everyone there knew, giving the impression of how good a man *he* was to be there with him as a friend.

We drew near, and my heart went out to him, sitting there unable to move by himself, but then thought quickly corrected as I remembered Paul's words, the need to keep thinking God-centred *all* the time. But in that brief moment he had turned his eyes back to Paul, and I saw Paul looking back at him, their eyes in deep communication. He had heard Paul speaking and I saw in his gaze a desire to know more. And in that same moment, my thoughts went back to the healing at the Beautiful Gate, where Peter and John had healed a man crippled from birth, - a healing that was so well known and shared among us Christians. The man healed was so joyful, leaping and praising God, - everyone in the temple knew it was he who had begged at the Beautiful Gate. There was great rejoicing with him, but as ever there were many that could not accept what had happened. That was also well known! And here we were, two followers of Jesus, also with a man that was lame from his birth. All these thoughts took place in a milli-second of time, - for as I watched, the contact between Paul and this man was strengthening.

How is it that what is invisible can be so real. The contact between these two dear people was not physical, but as tangible as, as what? As Love can be tangible. It was Love that linked them. I sensed that Paul had seen in him a readiness to be healed. What few words he must have heard I do not know, but the love that Paul shared was reflected back. The light in Paul's eyes was shining in his, lighting his whole face. I felt the presence of the healing Christ, and Paul's strong words again rang out:

"STAND UPRIGHT ON THY FEET"

Said with such authority! It was the Word of Truth, a command that could not be countered. There was no question of "BUT" or "HOW", no "Don't you understand?" but the meeting of faith, the unquestioning acknowledgment that his very being was at one with God

What Paul said he heard! And my goodness how he heard! He leaped up! He walked around. His smile shone as much as his eyes, and he went up to Paul as a man new-born, reaching out with his hands as he came effortlessly forward, shaking Paul's hands with a new found love and brotherly affection, turning to his friends and shouting with joy!

When you see a healing take place time stands still. It is as though time is being restarted in the freshness of now. He hugged the one friend so tight, standing upright together, standing apart and hugging again! Laughing with joy. He turned to his other friend, but he had gone. I glanced round and saw a man walking off, his head shaking in disbelief. This time my heart went out to him.

I said something special had happened. The few witnesses would be witness to everything that Paul had been saying. Some ran off with joy and purpose, seeking their friends to come and meet us before we moved on. Others were shouting with happiness, not sure whether to talk to the man or to Paul! The man next to me pulled at my arm, - "So what Paul has been saying, he's proved it! You've seen this all before!"

And that glowing realisation that that was exactly that! Jesus said to his disciples "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free". How free is that! No age, time, illness, disability can get in the way of knowing the love of God, and the joy of looking back, that just one man freed is fulfilling the command of Jesus. And the thought came to me "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you", - not do unto just someone else, - but others, - what a beginning!

Lystra is in my heart.

LOVE FILLS MY VERY BEING.

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