

Looking Back

(Acts 14:24-28)

Introduction

1. Series: Jesus accelerates us by the Holy Spirit to grow deeper through His family, wider in our impact for the gospel.
2. Background: God's focused, intentional, missional movement of the gospel into the Gentile world (cf. Acts 1:8).
 - a. Paul & Barnabas' commissioned by the church in Syrian Antioch on their first mission through Asia Minor.
3. Big Idea: At milestones, look back at Who has brought us thus far, what He has done, & celebrate with friends.

Look back to thank God [Acts 14:24-26]

1. [24-26a] Returning to the home church
 - a. [24] Paul & Barnabas return through the regions of Pisidia & Pamphylia, taking a roundabout way home.
 - b. [25] They stop longer in the city of Perga to teach about Jesus & minister to people there.
 - c. [26a] They continue on to the port city of Attalia
 - i. They sail directly back to Syrian (not Pisidian) Antioch, their home church.
 - d. It has been about 2 years since they left. Potential anxieties:
 - i. How much has changed at home over time?
 - ii. Will the people I know & love still be there? Will there be a lot of unfamiliar faces?
 - iii. Will I still feel welcomed? Will it still feel like home?
2. [26b] Why Paul & Barnabas return to Antioch
 - a. Luke (the author) emphasizes Antioch as the place where they were "commended to the grace of God."
 - i. Commended: Antioch Christians "came alongside to put into God's sovereign hands."
 - ii. Grace: Entrusted into God's unearned favor; not saving grace, but for his care, provision, protection.
 - b. Paul & Barnabas' journey does not appear to experience God's grace/favor:
 - i. Cyprus: Sorcerer contends against them, trying to convince governor they're frauds/crooks.
 - ii. Perga: Team member John-Mark abandons them & returns home.
 - iii. Pisidian Antioch: Gentiles respond joyfully to the gospel, but Jews reject it & drive them out.
 - iv. Iconium: Religious Jews plot to mistreat them (like Jesus; cf. Luke 18:32), so they flee.
 - v. Lystra: People first worship them as miracle-working gods, then turn against them.
 1. The crowd is influenced by religious Jews who chased from Antioch & Iconium.
 2. They attempt to kill Paul by stoning.
 - vi. At times, we may also feel like we're not experiencing God's grace & favor.
 - c. As they complete the mission, they return to the people/place that remind them they were entrusted into Jesus' hands of grace.
 - d. Application: At milestones, we need to look back and thank God for His favor/care for us.
 - i. It gives us the perspective that we need, instead of being blinded by painful circumstances.
 - ii. We remember not only the ones who prayed for us, but the One who answered.
3. [26c] There's an awareness of how the grace/power/help of God accomplished "the work that they had fulfilled."
 - a. Regardless of the opposition in each city, the churches were firmly planted & growing.
 - b. Application: At milestones, we need to look back and thank God for His work through us.
 - c. As we pass through milestones of life/ministry, look back to thank God.
 - i. Acknowledge & process the painful circumstances, but also acknowledge/thank Jesus for His care, protection & provision in the midst of those trials.
 - ii. Thank Him for the Kingdom work accomplished through you, the honor of participating in blessing others.
 - d. Application: What was the last milestone of life or ministry you've passed?

- i. Do you tend to speed past them & move on with life?
- ii. Take some time today to stop & reflect, looking back to thank God for His care/provision for you, & work/ministry through you.

Look back to encourage each other [Acts 14:27-28]

1. [27-28] Sharing with the family of Christ in Syrian Antioch
 - a. [27] When Paul & Barnabas return, word spread quickly & all the believers gather together to hear from them.
 - i. They share stories of Jesus' amazing care/provision for them & work through them.
 - b. [28] Instead of moving on to their next ministry, they stay for extended period of time.
 - i. To celebrate/worship Jesus together for what He's done for Paul/Barnabas & through them.
 - ii. To reconnect with the family of Christ & be filled up through fellowship, relationship, encouragement.
 - c. Application: At milestones, we need to look back to mutually encourage each other.
 - i. By praising/celebrating what Jesus has done in the stories of our lives/ministries.
 - ii. To stick around to connect in fellowship, relationship & encouragement.
2. How to create bonds with people who are very different
 - a. Satan's lie: Convince us other people are not worth connecting with or sticking around for.
 - i. After life/ministry experiences with God, it's easy to judge those who stayed behind as "less spiritual."
 - ii. It's easy to evaluate people through the world's eyes instead of Jesus': "They're too different, too weird, too much trouble."
 - b. Paul, Barnabas & people of Antioch aren't bound by societal commonalities
 - i. E.g., jobs, hobbies, politics, sports, interests, personalities, etc.
 - c. What drew the people to come, & draws/binds them together with Paul & Barnabas:
 - i. [27b] "They declared all that God had done."
 - ii. Together sharing about what Jesus is doing in/through their lives.
 - d. That's our commonality that encourages one another & forges bonds.
 - i. We are friends/family by sharing stories of what Jesus is doing: Giving new insight, healing, setting free, or empowering you to bless others.
 - ii. It helps us get over our social near-sightedness by seeing people through Jesus-glasses.
3. Application: We may not travel to Cyprus, Iconium or Ghana, but there's something good, holy & necessary about gathering back together with each other in fellowship.
 - a. To share with each other what Jesus is doing in/through us, & cross milestones of life together.
 - b. Challenge: Not just see church as "What can I get out of it?" But, "What encouragement can I give others?"
 - i. It takes us out of self-pity/self-centeredness to see God's presence, favor & help.
 - c. As we give thanks with others, there's a shared experience of knowing Jesus more.
 - i. As we hear others' stories, we find our own soul lifted up as well; we encourage one another.

Conclusion

1. As this series draws to a close, let's look back at 3 paths Jesus set us on over the past year:
 - a. Have you been transformed by Jesus?
 - i. The goal wasn't to "try harder", but to "stay connected" with Jesus & allow His Spirit do His work.
 - b. Instead of avoiding or holding people at a distance, did you embrace "porcupines" in church?
 - i. Were you committed to engaging, accepting, caring about each other?
 - ii. We repent of our prejudices, preferences & lack of love.
 - iii. We recognize the logs in our own eye & confess we are porcupines ourselves:
 1. How we are sinful, weird, hurtful, rough around edges, hard to get along with.
 - c. Did I bring good news about Jesus into the marketplaces where I live, work & play?
 - i. Teach people to repent from sin, announce good news about King Jesus, & that His Kingdom has come (not as earthly/political, but) as a spiritual reality ruled by the risen Lord named Jesus.
 - d. As we look back at what Jesus has done in/through you, give thanks for the ways He has accelerated our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit, for the glory of God & the good of others.
 - i. Do it together; look back & encourage one another.