



**Acts 14:21-28 – Evangelism & Persecution (Part 3)**  
**GCSP – 02/10/2007**

There is a story about three dogs. One was a little English Bulldog and the other two were Irish Setters. The bulldog occupied one backyard and the two setters occupied the adjoining backyard. Each morning, the little bulldog would crawl through a small opening in the fence and challenge the setters. Well, it wasn't much of a challenge. The bulldog was much smaller and it was after all two against one. The bulldog got the tar beat out of him and crawled home to lick his wounds.

The next morning, the little bulldog crawled back under the fence and took another beating. Once again he crawled back home and licked his wounds. This same routine went on for weeks, and each time the bulldog got whipped and had to crawl back home. But slowly but surely the tide was turning. The beating was becoming less severe and the little bulldog was starting to get his licks in as well. He was wearing the setters down and he knew it.

Not too long after things began to turn, the setters began hiding under the deck when the little bulldog crawled under the fence for his daily fight. That little bulldog just pranced around that yard like he owned the place – which in essence, he did. From the beginning, this little bulldog had a task to complete, and against formidable odds he persisted until his goal was reached.

Paul and Barnabas had a task before them when the church at Antioch of Syria commissioned them and sent them on a missionary journey to the island of Cyprus and the region of Galatia. They were severely mistreated, they faced a journey of some 600-700 miles on foot, besides the many days spent on ships, there was opposition at every stop, and they struggled at times to complete their mission. But complete it they did, and we will see the culmination of this first missionary journey this evening.

**Acts 14:21-28**

Let's pray.

By the time we finish tonight, we will have covered approximately two years in Paul and Barnabas' lives in the study of chapters 13 and 14 of the Book of Acts. They left the church in Antioch of Syria at the beginning of chapter 13 sometime in 47 AD and by the time they get back to the church at the end of chapter 14 it is sometime in 49 AD.

When we left off last week, the unbelieving Jews and the superstitious people of Lystra had stoned Paul. They had thought they had killed him and dragged his body outside the city for the wild animals and birds to have their way with him. But as we read in **verse 20**, Paul is miraculously healed and revived by God. He gets up and goes right back into the city. His mission was not yet complete. Almost getting stoned to death was simply a minor bump in the road. It was definitely no reason to pack up and go home. So the following morning they leave Lystra and travel about 60 miles to the city of Derbe – the last new stop on the journey. It would typically be a 2-3 day journey on foot.

In these first few verse tonight, we will see in a nutshell the entire purpose of this journey. You could outline the rest of this chapter in this way:

- Making Disciples
- Strengthening and Encouraging the Disciples
- Providing for the Disciples in Their Absence

- Reporting to the Disciple-Making Church Back Home

### Making Disciples

#### **v. 20b - 21a**

After an attempt has been made on Paul's life, the two missionaries realize that their efforts in the town of Lystra are temporarily over – but note that their mindset was that it was only temporarily over. As we will see briefly, they will return to Lystra.

Once they get to the city, they preach the gospel message to the people and many responded. And for all who responded, Paul and Barnabas now spend the necessary time making them into disciples of Jesus Christ.

And this, beloved, is our calling - to make disciples. It is not our job to make converts, it is our job, it is our duty, it is our calling, and it is our responsibility to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself has commanded us to make disciples in **Matthew 28:19-20**.

So the obvious questions that should be going through your mind right now are:

- What is a disciple?
- How do I make one?

So what is a disciple? The Greek word that is primarily used when you see the English translation, "disciple" is "*mathetes*." It means, "learner, pupil, or disciple." The very existence of a "*mathetes*" or a disciple requires a "*didaskalos*" or a teacher. You cannot have a learner or a pupil without a teacher. So the first thing we must understand about making a disciple is that it requires a relationship. It is a relationship in which knowledge, wisdom, discernment, understanding, behavior, and values are transmitted from the teacher to the pupil. And this relationship must be hands-on. You cannot simply tell someone how to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, you have to model it, and show the disciple how it's done.

*Mathetes* implies an apprentice mindset. The disciple is literally dependent upon the teacher for his or her learning. In the past, an apprentice would leave his home as a young adolescent and move into the home of the master. Over many years the apprentice would follow the master and watch everything he did and listen to everything he said. After many years the master would then allow the apprentice to actually begin doing some things. As the master watched, he would make the necessary adjustments to the teaching and training as warranted by the skill the young apprentice exhibited.

It is also implied in the meaning of *mathetes*, that the skills and learning would otherwise be unobtainable apart from the teacher-pupil relationship. To truly become a disciple required the hands-on training that does not simply come from book learning. Becoming a disciple requires doing the skills and concepts and principles you have learned in the presence of the master or teacher.

So a disciple is a student under the tutelage of a master/teacher in a personal one-on-one relationship for the purpose of transmitting the knowledge and wisdom and skill that the master/teacher has to the disciple, in order that the new disciple will be equipped to do the same.

How do you make a disciple? The first thing we have to consider is how do you choose someone to disciple?

There is nothing in the Bible that tells us or shows us the formula for putting disciples and teachers together. But it is interesting to note how the Twelve Disciples that we read about in the gospels came to be. Who chose whom? Jesus chose the Twelve; they did not choose Him. In all of Paul's writings we do not have an account of someone approaching Paul and asking to be discipled. It may have happened, but it appears that Paul followed the lead of Jesus and chose the ones he discipled.

Now I am not saying that this is the model we are to follow because it is not commanded of us in Scripture to follow this procedure; but it is intriguing nonetheless.

So what if the disciple you have is not showing the necessary interest and commitment to becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ? If this happens, you first need to confront them concerning their lack of desire to obey the Scriptures. If their behavior persists, you simply let them go and seek out someone else to begin the process with.

**John 6:66** is one of the saddest verses in the Bible. It says, "**As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore**" (NASB).

Jesus let these "disciples" go and focused His attention on those who stayed. Jesus turns to the Twelve and asks, "**You do not want to go away also do you?**" **Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life"** (**John 6:67b-68**).

Is it any wonder that churches today are lacking in spiritual depth, and thus lacking in the power of the Holy Spirit? They lack these things because they lack true disciples. They lack true disciples primarily because no one is answering the call of Jesus to make disciples.

Now some of you may be feeling a certain measure of conviction in your hearts but at the same time you are probably feeling justified in your lack of having a personal one-on-one discipling relationship; after all, no one ever discipled you in this way. How can I be expected to disciple someone else if I have never been trained how to do this?

First of all, that is not a valid excuse. The Great Commission does not say, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, if someone has already done the same for you." We do not have an out in this command. If you are going to truly follow what God wants from you while on this earth you must, you must, you must, make disciples.

That being said, I know this is a major problem in the overwhelming majority of churches across the world – and it is a problem at Grace Church as well. So at some point in the near future we are going to eliminate the excuse of "I don't know how to disciple someone."

In the mean time, you can disciple someone without having a set program and curriculum. You simply teach them what you have been taught through your years as a Christian. Find someone who needs to learn more about Jesus Christ, and who needs to learn more about how to live the Christian life. Invest your time and invest your life into one of your brothers and sisters in Christ. Don't think about it, don't pray about it, simply do it! It frustrates me to no end when a Christian says they need to pray about a direct command of Scripture. Do you think God is going to send you down an answer of, "Okay, in your case you don't have to obey My Word, but everyone else has to"?

Follow the example of Paul and Barnabas, and obey the command of Scripture, and make disciples!

## Strengthen and Encourage the Disciples

### **v. 21b-22**

At our Praise & Prayer gathering last night, I saw several who had pulled another aside for the purpose of encouraging them in the situations they were faced with. I heard some quoting Scripture and explaining how to apply it to their lives. This is a part of what it means to strengthen and encourage the disciples.

We humans are a fickle lot. We can have all the great intentions in the world to live our lives as we should, but we all too often lose the battle with the influences of the world and fall back into our same old routines. We desperately need to be strengthened and encouraged by our brothers and sisters in Christ. These gatherings on Saturday night, the Monday night Bible study, the Wednesday night Bible study, and the monthly Praise & Prayer are designed for this very purpose. If you are not consistently involved in one or more of these gatherings you are losing the battle.

But as important as these gatherings are, it is even more important that we are connecting with one another on an individual basis to strengthen and encourage one another with the principles, and promises, and comfort of God's Word.

And if nobody is approaching you to strengthen and encourage you, then you approach someone. If the person you approach refuses to help or refuses to follow through, then approach someone else. Don't stop, and don't sulk, and don't stomp off into a corner somewhere to have a pity party, you persist until you find someone who will help you grow into the disciple you are called to be. Be like the little bulldog in my opening illustration – be persistent in your pursuit of godliness in your own life. It is your responsibility – don't blame it on other people. God will deal with those who refuse to obey His calling on their lives you just obey His calling on yours.

At the end of their journey, Paul and Barnabas retraced their steps and visited the disciples they had made in the various cities and towns to strengthen and encourage them in their newfound faith in Jesus Christ. We must do the same. Pick up the phone, write a letter, or go visit people that you have shared your life with. Strengthen and encourage them in the Lord, and look for opportunities to strengthen and encourage others as the Lord brings them in your path.

## Providing for the Disciples in Their Absence

### **v. 23-25**

There comes a point in time where a discipleship relationship has to end. There are others that need to be discipled and their other missions that God has in store for the discipler. Paul and Barnabas knew that they might not ever see these brothers and sisters again in this life. So they made provisions to make sure they had others to continue to teach and train them in the ways of the Lord. Paul and Barnabas established churches and appointed elders, those who had exhibited an understanding of God and were already mature in their faith.

And then it says, **"they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed."** And beloved, this is a key. We have to let go sometimes and trust that the Lord will take care of them and provide for their spiritual maturity in our absence. It is like watching your children move out of the house to live their own lives.

There will come a time in this church when we have to say goodbye to a teacher or a pastor whom God has called to another work. If that teacher or pastor is worth his salt, he will have

made sure that others are ready and qualified to step into his shoes and continue the work. That's what Paul and Barnabas did.

#### Reporting to the Disciple-Making Church Back Home

##### **v. 26-28**

They completed their assignment. Paul and Barnabas now reported all that God had done over the last two years. God gave them an assignment and God then provided every step of the way all that they needed to complete the assignment. It was not without problems and troubles and trials, but God was faithful to see them through every one of the trials.

Beloved, if we are going to follow Jesus Christ, if we are going to be obedient to the Holy Spirit's call, if we are going to live our lives according God's Word, then we must make disciples. But rest assured, the same God who called you to the task will equip you and enable you to complete the task.

Let's pray.