

Hardships

“They preach the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said,” (Acts 14:21-22)

The two men of God, Paul and Barnabas were preaching the good news; *‘there is hope, there is life, a new life after death. There is resurrection, there is a way toward heaven, and there is a way to avoid hell, a way to get rid of sins that cause death. “We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers He has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: ‘You are my Son; today I have become your father.” (Acts 13:32-33) “Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.” (Acts 13:38)*

Paul and Barnabas proclaimed the good news and won large numbers of disciples in different cities. From one city to another, they returned back to some of the previous cities they were been like in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the believers and encouraging the disciples to remain true to the faith:

1. We must go through: We believe in Jesus and we receive Eternal life, but to reach that heaven we must go through certain avenues. The people of God gained freedom from slavery. But to reach the Promised Land they passed through the Red Sea and through the desert of Sinai. Likewise, to reach our promised land, the eternal life, we must stand firm and pursue the faith we received as we go through the waters and fires of hardships.

2. Many hardships: Not one or two but many hardships we will go through like:

a) Rejection: The new life that we received may not be acceptable to our friends and those whom we are with. The new lifestyle we have after accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour may seem so different to them, and our tasks may as well look weird to their eyes. Before, we were allies on certain things but after receiving the word of God, discernment of right and wrong has come, and separation of righteous and wicked took place. *“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” (Hebrews4:12)* The rejection or the incompatibility that we face is not only inclusive to our friendship relation, but may even extend to our families and near relatives, like husband, wife, parents, and children. Because when we accepted Jesus we left behind the previous customs, traditions, and religions in order to enjoy the new life in Christ. And by this we are separated from them, having disharmony, and not in peace. The Lord Jesus declares, *“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to*

turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.” (Matthew 10:34-36)

b) Persecution: This could be an announcement of war from the world against us. The persecution may affect our jobs, our possessions or treasures. It may cause us losing a social position, peaceful citizenship, a place in a country, a land or a home. The persecution against us may increase and put us in very difficult situations. Paul and Barnabas who preached the good news in different cities found themselves many times rejected, persecuted, stoned, their lives threatened, and even imprisoned.

c) Temptation: The world is against the word of God. After we received the word of God, we have to set our lives on a different style than that of the world around us. We have to resist the worldly view of life to overcome temptation, while we try to live away from sin of lust, immoral relations and greed to gain money and possession. *“Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes the enemy of God.” (James4:4)* This is another struggle that s disciple should face.

3. To enter the Kingdom of God: The above mentioned hardships that the word of God declares should not bring us back to our old ways of life but to:

a) Encourage us: If we are facing hardships of any kind we must not think that we are in a wrong way, but this may confirm to us the right choice we have made. *“If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or a thief or any other kind of criminal, or even a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.” (I Peter 4:14-16)*

b) Strengthen us: The confirmation that we receive from the word of God will hold us not to go back but to remain true to the faith, and to push us forward to the destiny our Lord has planned for us. *“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy one, your Saviour.” (Isaiah43:2-3)* The water cleanses us, the rivers challenge us, the fire purifies us, and the promises of God in His word keep us intact in faith on Christ Jesus.

My dear and beloved, the goodness of this life as well as the hardships we cannot deny. But, if we receive the true blood of Jesus that shed on the cross, we have eternal life. *“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under His control will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” (Philippians 3:20-21)* As we agree to pray.

My Prayer: Father God I come before you in the name of Jesus who died on the cross for my sins to give me eternal life. Lord guide and help and strengthen to stand firm in faith understanding that trial, persecution, hardships and rejection is part of your calling to me. Lord gives me more grace and strength to go on and serve you and to be fruitful inspite of all pain. This is my prayer in Jesus name Amen.