

Many Happy Returns

J.D. Greear said, “Without a mission, a church is not a church; it’s just a bunch of disobedient Christians hanging out.”

The mission of the church is to make disciples who make disciples, or to say it another way, our mission is to make more and better disciples together. This process involves three things captured in remembering three verbs: evangelize, establish and equip. Making disciples begins with evangelizing. Evangelizing is sharing the good news of Christ with those who have not yet believed, trusting that faith comes through others hearing the message of the gospel. When someone does believe and turns from sin to Christ, he or she needs to begin to be established (to be made more and more stable) in the faith and equipped to evangelize and establish others. In Acts 14, beginning in verse 21 we will see this process modeled as we are told about what Paul and Barnabas did to establish and equip disciples in several cities.

They returned to the churches which they had begun, and they provided encouragement (and strength). To further establish these disciples, they strengthened them in the faith that they had heard and believed and encouraged them in the faith, particularly to continue in the faith. The faith referenced here refers to the content of the Christian gospel. Continuing in the faith would not be easy to do because they would go through much tribulation in order to enter the kingdom of God.

Since Paul and Barnabas could not stay for long and the disciples in each city would need continuing encouragement and strength in the faith in order to continue in it in the midst of tribulations. After Paul and Barnabas left, the believers in the churches would need to be further established and equipped in order for them to remain in the faith. But how would this happen when Paul and Barnabas were gone?

To meet this need, they provided elders. They appointed men in all of these churches to teach and lead as elders. These elders would continually strengthen and encourage these churches, in the absence of Paul and Barnabas, through teaching the gospel. Men of moral character, who had a loyalty to the apostles teaching (the faith) and who had a gift to teach it effectively were appointed as elders. They would teach them again and again, and more and more about what Paul and Barnabas had been; teaching them about the love of Christ- “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her; the power of Christ- “...I live, yet not I but Christ in me”; the hope of Christ- “...when Christ who is our life appears then we also will appear with him in glory.

So, after they returned to the churches which they had begun they returned to the church where they had begun and declared all that God had done with them as his instruments. And they remained no little time with the disciples (at Antioch, where they had been

There are some important things to realize here. Paul and Barnabas didn’t just make disciples they started churches. These disciples, committed to Christ, assembled together because they were committed and connected to each other. Also, Paul and Barnabas were sent out from and remained connected to a church.

My prayer for SCBC is that we would continue to be a sending church, like the church that sent Paul and Barnabas. When it comes to the foreign dimension of our mission, there are only three options: go, send or disobey.