

## THURSDAY 28 April 2022 "Joy in Suffering" (Matt. 5:11,12; John 15:18-16:11)

Good Thursday morning to you my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

*In the weeks following Easter, I would imagine the greatest challenge facing the disciples and other friends of Jesus was adjusting back to the 'new normal' of life without Jesus PRESENT everyday with them.* For several months they had literally 'walked with Jesus' every day, and now, following the horrific experience of Easter weekend, they knew Jesus was ALIVE, but He was not always present with them! In fact, each morning when they awakened, each of these friends of Jesus wondered; *'Will I see Jesus today? If so, where, when, and in what situation? How should I spend this day not knowing if I'll see Jesus or not?'*

In some ways it's the same question you and I ask every day, isn't it, my friends? Oh, you might be surprised by a miraculous experience today that causes you to realize God is very near you, he's watching over you and directly involved in your life, but *very likely you will not SEE the physical body of the resurrected Jesus today, nor will you or I actually HEAR Jesus audibly speaking with us today.* Therefore our day today is in many ways similar to those friends of Jesus 2000 years ago. How should we spend this day in tune with Jesus, living for God's honor and glory, yet not seeing or hearing Jesus?

Jesus had promised His friends that the Holy Spirit of God would live within them and guide them, teach them, counsel them as they needed God's help. *So how have you found this to work practically, in reality?* Yesterday I left you on the hillside in Galilee with the risen Jesus and His friends as He spoke to them the words many call the "Great Commission", it described their life purpose for the rest of their lives. Jesus had said ***"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore, as you are going, make disciples of all people, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you, and I will be with you always, even to the end of the age."*** (Matt. 28:18-20)

We have no record that Jesus said anything more that day, but I'm sure He probably did, as they all sat together on that hillside looking out over Lake Galilee and remembering their times together in the boats on that lake. I assume the disciples had questions, probably many questions! They were needing to get on with their lives. They each needed some income for living, a place to live, and if they were married, spouses to care for and children to raise. *So how would the months they'd had with Jesus now fit into their normal, daily, practical lives while at the same time trying to live out that "great commission" of making disciples, without Jesus present?*

I wonder if Matthew looked around that hillside and remembered it was probably the very same hillside where Jesus had been gathered with a huge crowd several months before. Perhaps it was that day Matthew began to reconsider his life as a tax collector as he listened to Jesus speak. Matthew records 3 chapters of what Jesus had said that day, including these words which may have seemed so very practical this day as Matthew sat with the other disciples and resurrected Jesus, not long after Easter: ***"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*** (Matt. 5:11,12)

Wow! When Matthew the tax collector had heard Jesus say those words, several months ago, he probably thought of the abuse he took from people who didn't want to pay the tax he was demanding of them, or the accusations from people that he was overcharging them, or unfairly taxing them. But now, after spending a week in Jerusalem in hiding for fear of their lives because of what they had witnessed in Jesus' crucifixion, these words of Jesus took on a whole new meaning for Matthew and the other close friends of Jesus. Yet in that moment Matthew could not have imagined the level of intense persecution most ALL followers of Jesus would experience in the first century as the Roman emperor Nero and others were determined to eradicate the name Jesus from Roman society across the entire empire! You've undoubtedly heard the stories of beatings and Christians burned alive like torches and many other horrific things done in the first century. Peter, another of those disciples sitting on the hillside that day wrote two letters to the Christians across the empire, a few years later, and this matter of injustice and persecution and suffering was a major topic in those letters.

*So, look around your part of the world today my friends, do you see injustice, harassment and persecution aimed at Christians? Are you able to take encouragement from these words Jesus spoke on the hillside that day? Do you see such persecution has been going on for centuries and do you understand *it is fundamentally a rejection of God, God's values, and God's truth? It is a widespread rejection of EASTER!* Is your response retaliation, anger, bitterness, rage? Or do you remember, as I'm sure Matthew did, what Jesus had said in the upper room in Jerusalem, to His disciples, the evening before His crucifixion, that Easter weekend: ***"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated Me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you OUT of the world. That is why it hates you... If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also... They will treat you this way because of My name, for they do not know the One who sent Me... Whoever hates Me, hates My Father as well... They will put you out of the Synagogue, in fact the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. They will do such things because they do NOT know God the Father or Me. I have told you this so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you..."*** (John 15:18-16:11)*

But then into Matthew's mind came the words Jesus had spoken only a few moments ago: **"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me... I will be with you always, even to the end of the age."** (Matt. 28:18,20) *So Matthew understood at that moment, as you and I should understand today... as the world rejected Jesus, so the world will reject followers of Jesus, who bring Jesus' message of hope, anywhere in the world, in every generation. Why? Because evil always opposes good, darkness always seeks to extinguish the light.* But the Holy Spirit of God is vibrantly alive in followers of Jesus and as Jesus said, all the eternal glories and joy of heaven awaits us who are faithfully following Jesus! *While we do not SEE Jesus today, our minds and hearts are guided and inspired and protected by His Holy Spirit, even in suffering!*

Years later the Apostle Paul wrote this which helps us see purpose in the pain: **"We glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance produces character; and character produces hope. And hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us!"** (Rom. 5:3-5) So friends, can we join with Matthew in finding comfort and life purpose in these powerful truths, even in days of painful suffering? I've found a song to help us consider these truths today. I hope it encourages you as you worship along with it...

**Today's Scripture is**

**Matthew 5:11,12; John 15:18-16:11.**