

WEEKEND Edition 28/29 May 2022 "PRAY!"

(Acts 1:10-14)

Good Weekend to you my 'Walking with Jesus' friends,

If you think back over your life, I wonder what you would identify to be the most significant three events of your entire life? For the people living in the Roman Empire in the first century there were many, many significant, historic events from about 6bc to about 30ad. But when looking at those years from our vantage point, 2000 years later, may I suggest the three most significant events in the lifetime of those living at that time were:

1. The miraculous, angels announced, birth of the baby named Jesus, born in a stable in Bethlehem.

WHY? Because that Baby was fully human but also fully God! *This event brought God to live here on earth with us!*

2. The horrific but extremely significant events of Passover/Easter weekend... the betrayal, trials, beatings, crucifixion, burial and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ!

WHY? Because through those events Jesus, God incarnate, paid the atonement death price for ANY human being who desired to be forgiven of their sins, by Holy God, and drawn into a relationship with God which would assure them of eternity in heaven.

3. The miraculous ascension of Jesus Christ from the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem up into the sky and back to heaven from which He came, in FULL VIEW of many people and with the explanation of angels.

WHY? Because now from His throne room in heaven the living, resurrected, ascended Jesus reigns as supreme sovereign over all things in heaven and on earth; and He is right now redeeming condemned, repentant sinners and transforming them into adopted sons and daughters of Almighty God, who then have the Holy Spirit of God living within them, guiding them each day for the rest of their earthly lives!

Now, yes, it's true many significant human events occurred during the lifetime of those who lived in the early years of the first century, *but none of those significant events come anywhere close to these three Jesus events in terms of global, long-term impact on humanity!!* Now I'd like to invite you to ponder that for a moment before you continue today.

How long those men and women stood there on the Mount of Olives looking up into the sky and then at each other and then across the Kidron Valley to the bustling great city of Jerusalem, I can't tell you.

Nor can I tell you how long the two angels described in Acts 1:10 remained with them on that hillside, nor if those angels said anything beyond what Luke recorded for us. What I can tell you with certainty is that those eyewitnesses to the ascension of Jesus from earth to heaven, experienced life change that day. *Never before and never again, for the rest of their lives, did they see or experience anything like that ascension.*

Of course, because they were eyewitnesses, we can imagine they found themselves over and over and over again, perhaps for the rest of their lives, trying to answer questions which really no one can answer. How do you explain the ascension of Jesus? What made Him elevate into the sky? After the cloud covered Him from sight, where did He go? Where is heaven? When He arrived there, how was He received? What exactly did the angels mean by saying ***"This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven."*** (Acts 1:11)

Oh, we understand the words... it will be the same Jesus, not a different Jesus. And He will return, coming physically, bodily down from heaven as He left. That's what the words say... but exactly when, exactly how, exactly where, and how should we prepare ourselves etc.? Oh, those and so many more questions have been debated ever since that day on the Mount of Olives.

But what happened next is the question I'd like us to consider for a moment today... Luke tells us: ***"The apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives... When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brothers."*** (Acts 1:12-14) So it appears after a prolonged time of standing on that Mount of Olives hillside trying to understand what they had seen with their own eyes, but simply could not fully comprehend nor explain,... they knew life had to go on, so they walked down the hillside toward the Garden of Gethsemane, across the little Kidron Valley, and onto the road that took them through one of the great gates of Jerusalem, and finally to the home where they had been staying. I doubt anyone talked as they walked. *Oh, they all had questions, but no one had any answers.*

I'm so glad Luke says they gathered together and did one thing... ***"They all joined together constantly in prayer..."*** (Acts 1:14) Look around the room... over there is Peter, Andrew and James...praying. Over there, Nathaniel, Philip, and Matthew praying. Yes, do you see them, over there, John huddled together with Mary Magdalene and Mary Jesus' mother... praying. And over there? Yes, that's right, those are the brothers of Jesus, who didn't believe it, at all... and often mocked Him, but now, they are right in the middle of this... praying! How many are there, 20, 25, 30 or more of these dear friends of Jesus all doing the same thing... *asking God their questions, thanking God for Jesus, asking God to help them understand what they'd seen and what it all means, and maybe the most frequently asked question in those prayers... what now? What, God, do you want us to do now?*

There are important lessons here my friends: when you don't know what to do...PRAY! When you have questions, but you can't find answers... PRAY! When you experience things you can't understand... PRAY! Why? *Because God is the best and only place to go in times like these.* I've learned... don't pick up the phone, don't get on social media, don't run to Google, don't turn on the radio or TV, don't grab a high calorie drink or worse an alcoholic drink... PRAY!

Let's pause right here and learn some important life lessons with some important life questions, are you ready?

When you pray, what do you do and for how long?

When you pray, who are you talking to and what are you expecting?

When you pray, what words do you use? Something you memorized as a kid, something pre-written in a prayer book, or are you having a spontaneous, authentic conversation with God?

When you pray, is there a particular posture you find most helpful? Standing, lying flat on the ground, kneeling, arms raised, hands folded, eyes closed... what is your best posture for approaching Almighty, Holy, Majestic God in prayer?

When you pray what is your mind thinking about? How do you keep your mind from wandering when you pray? Do you pray out loud or silently? And how do you know when it's time to say 'amen' and get on with your day or night?

May I give you a few tips I've learned over the years that really help me in my time of the type of praying these people were doing in that room together after the ascension of Jesus?

First, I pray with my Bible close by and open, so if my mind begins to wander, I can look at God's Word and get refocused, usually with a Psalm, like Psalm 19 for instance.

Second, in these types of intense prayer times, I pray with my journal & pen beside me, so I can write down any thoughts which come to my mind which I believe have come from the Holy Spirit of God.

Third, I pray out loud, carefully, respectfully choosing my words, not rambling. I'm speaking with the Majesty, the Almighty God!

Fourth, I pause often when I'm praying like this. Why? I'm listening! It's far more important what God will say to me than what I will say to God!!! I can't hear His voice very well when I'm talking.

Fifth, I balance my praise of Him, my thanksgiving for who God is and all God has done and is doing, with any requests I may be bringing to God.

Sixth, if I feel a song of worship stirring in my heart, I assume that's the Holy Spirit leading me to worship, so I do! Not usually loudly, but I lift my heart and my voice in song, and almost always I sense an outpouring of blessing from God as He welcomes my worship!

Ok now, how about one more... *I repent when I pray!* I ask God to show me anything in my heart, my mind, my words or actions that are NOT honoring to Him. I never argue with what the Holy Spirit shows me, I repent, right now, because I want that ugly stuff out of my life, and I ask Him to cleanse me... and I then keep on worshiping and praying!

Oh my... I can't just write about it; I am feeling drawn to pray... right now, how about you? And here's a song to help us... I wonder if this song is a beautiful reflection of what they were praying in that room that day in Jerusalem, hours after Jesus left them and returned to His heaven? Let's PRAY!!

Today's Scripture is Acts 1:10-14.