

FRIDAY 01 July 2022 "Samaritan Christians Really?" (Acts 8:17-19)

Hello my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

Today we begin a new month together, July. I wonder what the highlights of the month of June were for you. *Do you wonder what God might have in store for you in July 2022? Here we go. . .*

Let's rejoin the excitement in the province of Samaria, about 2000 years ago. Philip, one of the 7 men selected and commissioned as "deacons" had fled Jerusalem due to the outrageous persecution against followers of Jesus in that city and Philip had gone north into Samaria. I don't know if he had any extended family or friends there *or was it the Holy Spirit of God who led Philip to one particular, unnamed, Samaritan city?*

What Acts 8 tells us is that Philip began telling the story of Jesus, almost as soon as he arrived, and empowered by the Holy Spirit Philip was doing some miracles, which we presume were the same types of miracles happening in Jerusalem... people being healed, and demonic spirits bound, and people set free from their bondage. The response of the Samaritan people in that city is understandable... they were amazed. *Evidently, they were able to distinguish the difference between the miracles Philips was doing by the power of the Holy Spirit of God and the magic Simon the sorcerer had been doing for many years, powered by the evil spirits.* Even Simon trusted in Jesus and was baptized. Can you imagine the internal struggle Simon wrestled with as he compared the darkness of what he had known for so long, with the freedom in Christ that Philip apparently had?

Yesterday we saw that the apostles in Jerusalem were flabbergasted by the reports they were hearing. It made no sense to them! *They firmly believed that Jesus had come as their Jewish Messiah and the salvation He had earned on the cross was for the redemption of Israel, Jews only!* As I showed you yesterday, even though Jesus had often used words like 'everyone' or 'whoever' or 'the world', still *the Jewish followers of Jesus, and even the apostles, were convinced the new life available in a relationship with Jesus was NOT available to Gentiles or Samaritans...* Jews only! So, the apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to that Samaritan city where Philip was, to investigate.

Upon their arrival Peter and John found many Samaritans had believed the truth Philip had preached about Jesus and they had trusted fully in Jesus for their salvation from their sin, and they had even been baptized in water by Philip, as the Jewish believers in Jerusalem had done. Even Simon the sorcerer had become a follower of Jesus. But there was one problem... the closer Peter and John looked, the more they spoke with these Samaritan Jesus followers, **something was missing.** *They saw no evidence of the Holy Spirit of God in these Samaritan believers!*

That left Peter and John in a great dilemma. Two fundamental questions needed to find answers:

First question: *Is it possible for Samaritans to be saved by faith in Jesus Christ and His Gospel, in the very same way Jews were saved? If so, WHY? Why would God save Samaritans? They were not pure Jews; their blood lines had been defiled by intermarrying with Gentiles!*

Second question: *If it is possible for Samaritans to experience the very same salvation as Jews who trust in Jesus, then WHY was there no evidence of the Holy Spirit in these Samaritan Jesus followers?*

While Luke doesn't tell us, I well imagine Peter, John and Philip stayed up late into the night, maybe many nights, discussing and praying over these two BIG questions, for only God could provide the answers. As they wrestled and prayed, *evidently the Holy Spirit convinced all three men that YES, it was God's intention and desire that Samaritans were given the very same opportunity for a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, as the Jews had.* I'm sure they recounted to each other that powerful experience they had had with Jesus in the Samaritan town of Sychar when Jesus was warmly welcomed and invited to stay two days among the Samaritans as Jesus explained God's love for Samaritans. Peter and John could not deny what they had seen with their own eyes in Sychar. Nearly the whole town had been changed as many of the people put their full trust in Jesus! John later recorded that event in chapter 4 of his account of the life of Jesus.

Sometimes Luke writes in great detail, other times he just states it plain and simple. This is one of those times. Acts 8:17 simply says: ***"Then Peter and John placed their hands on them [Samaritan believers], and they received the Holy Spirit."*** That's it! But I assume Peter and John first taught the people what they had learned from Jesus about the Holy Spirit, and then explained to them what they had experienced in Jerusalem as the Holy Spirit had come upon them when they believed in Jesus and were baptized. I am confident Peter and John explained that they were going to place their hands on these people and pray for them, as they had done when they commissioned Philip and the other six Deacons. I'm confident they explained that in their prayer they'd be asking Jesus to send the Holy Spirit of God upon them, Samaritans, as He had upon the Jews in Jerusalem. Luke gives us no details of what happened when they prayed. But the very next verse in Luke's account says this: ***"When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostle's hands Simon offered them money and said, 'Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.'" (Acts 8:18)***

So, what happened? Nowhere in Scripture do I find a specific answer to that question. Luke tells us Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, sometime later, but there is no record of their report of what happened in Samaria. The best I can find is that this same Peter, a short while later, was led by the Holy Spirit to travel to the city of Caesarea and

enter the home of a Roman Centurion soldier named Cornelius. We'll look closely at that event in a few days. We presume Cornelius is a Gentile, but he also is identified as a devout follower of the God of Abraham and he has summoned Peter, as a disciple of Jesus, to explain to Cornelius, and his house full of people, what the truth is about Jesus Christ and His Gospel. The record says that as Peter explained, Cornelius and the people trusted in Jesus, ***"The Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The Jewish believers in Jesus who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God."*** (Acts 10:45,46) As Peter explained this miracle to the rest of the apostles in Jerusalem to tell them what had happened in Caesarea, Peter said: ***"They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have."*** (Acts 10:47) So that tells me Peter and John had the same experience with the Samaritan followers of Jesus. Evidently, they began to speak in languages they did not know, but languages known by others, just as had happened in Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit first came on the day of Pentecost. (Acts 2)

My friends, in Acts 8, as Peter and John pray over these Samaritan believers in Jesus and they receive the Holy Spirit of God, as the Jews had in Jerusalem, **this was a defining moment for all time for Christianity.** God was making a definitive and powerful statement. *God was declaring that the salvation of these Samaritans who had trusted in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins was just as legitimate as the salvation of the Jews in Jerusalem who had trusted in Jesus in the same way. God was saying these Samaritans were being drawn into relationship with HIM through Jesus Christ in exactly the same way God drew Jews to Himself through Jesus.*

Therefore, these Samaritans were experiencing **redemption** (Eph. 1:7) and the full **forgiveness** of their sins by their faith in Jesus' atonement death. God was **reconciling** them to Himself through Jesus (Col. 1:21,22) and God was **regenerating** them with a new spiritual nature (John 3:3-7) and God was **adopting** them as His sons and daughters (Romans 8:14-17) and God was **assuring them of eternal life** in heaven with Him (John 5:24). God was destroying the barrier of prejudice and bigotry which had existed for 700 years between Jews & Samaritans as God brought them together in the global 'church' Jesus was building. (Matt. 16:18)

I don't know how long Peter and John stayed in this Samaritan city, but I can assure you that this experience was life changing for them both. Jews and Samaritans united together in Jesus. Let's pause right here and enjoy this amazing experience with them and here's a song for reflection...

Today's Scripture is Acts 8:17-19.