

## MONDAY 20 June 2022 "Utopia??" (Acts 4:32-36)

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

So, I begin today with an important question... *what news headlines would bring a smile to your face, peace to your hearts, and a wonderful sense that all is well in the world today?* Could that ever be possible?

Let's go to a brief season in history about 2000 years ago, when the description of life in Jerusalem could almost be considered 'utopia'! Yes, it was during the sometimes-brutal Roman empire domination of Israel and yes, we're continuing to follow Dr. Luke's account of what happened in the city of Jerusalem in the weeks and months that followed *history's most famous and significant weekend... the Passover/Easter weekend when Jesus Christ was crucified and then rose from the dead three days later!*

Acts 4:32 begins the description of this 'utopian' season: ***"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them."*** (Acts 4:32,33) Now in the modern global political conversation some might say that must have been socialism at its best!? *No, my friends, that is the work of God!*

Do you see that very first phrase? These followers of Jesus were ***'one in heart and mind'***. Now, no matter where you live in the world, that is nothing short of miraculous, even in an extended family, much less several thousand people, right? Remember these Luke calls "**believers**" were a very eclectic group of more than 5000 people. While most were Jewish, many were not from Jerusalem, not even from this region, they had come from far away for the Pentecost festival! But their common recognition of Jesus as their Messiah, and their common trust in Jesus to be their Savior, and their common baptism by the Holy Spirit experience had drawn their hearts and mind together to one common life purpose: *They all wanted to honor God with their lives, experience the full life transforming work of the Holy Spirit within them, and live their lives fully devoted to Jesus as their Savior and Lord!*

**With that common experience and life purpose, the unity they were experiencing was 'utopian'!** Have you ever experienced anything like that? And would you agree some of the greatest hurdles to this 'utopia' are pride, selfishness, ego, jealousy, unforgiveness, and bitterness? *And do you agree these are some of the very things the Holy Spirit removes from our lives and replaces with what Paul called the **"fruit of the Spirit"**?* Remember Galatians 5:22,23? ***"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control..."***

Do you see Luke describes that *these Jesus followers were unusually alert and sensitive to the needs of each other and when they saw a need they responded with great generosity so that no one was living in need?* That's almost beyond belief isn't it my friends? Look around your neighborhood, your extended family, your co-workers or even the people who are part of your church. It's not difficult to see some are living with more resources than others, right? That was true in Jerusalem too, but it seems *the Holy Spirit was giving these new Christians a God given awareness that everything they had was given to them by God, everything!* And therefore, as the Holy Spirit made them aware of need, it was with gratitude to God that those who had an abundance quickly recognized God was leading them to share HIS resources to help those in need, for HIS glory! Do you see that my friends? The initiative was not on the part of the needy asking for help, but rather on the part of those with enough, watching with Holy Spirit sensitivity to see how God wanted them to bless someone God knew was in need. I think that meant the need was sometimes not obvious but rather only God knew about the need! *Do you think you could develop that type of sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit regarding the resources God has entrusted to you?*

*This is miraculous friends, for many were discovering the outrageous joy of being a channel for God to distribute His resources to meet needs HE sees.* I believe that means there were times some people generously gave something to another person even though no one had asked, and no one had made a need known! The Holy Spirit knew and moved in generous hearts, so rather than it being welfare, it was generosity without shame, with no strings attached, and sometimes even anonymously, which resulted in great praise to God!

Do you also see those who had been Jesus' disciples and knew Him best, were now called apostles, and they were busy every day, all day, telling these spiritually hungry people everything that they had seen, heard, and learned from Jesus! Jesus had promised the Holy Spirit would help them remember all He had said so they could repeat it accurately and help people understand what it meant and how to apply it to their lives! (John 14:26) Some of them like Matthew and John were beginning to write their memories. But Luke says they had great Holy Spirit power upon them, and I believe that means despite the opposition of those religious leaders who had once jailed Peter and John, these apostles courageously, boldly told the story of Jesus even though they knew prison might be where they would spend the night! *It was a remarkable time and Jerusalem was being powerfully impacted by the power of the Holy Spirit changing lives!*

Luke next describes something almost outrageous: "***From time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need!***" (Acts 4:34,35) May I ask, have you ever seen anything quite like this? We're not talking about a little handout here friends, this is now big money. Houses and real estate then as now were extremely valuable. *A wide range of significant needs were being met as the Holy Spirit both led some to be sacrificial generosity, but also led the Apostles to distribute these funds with great wisdom.*

Of course, then as now people rolled their eyes when they heard such things, so Luke gives us one specific example: **"Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field that he owned and brought the money to the apostles."** Remember this guy... we're going to meet him again in a few days, as the Holy Spirit leads him to a significant role in the spread of this "Jesus movement" across the Roman empire! *May I ask, do you know anyone who is a great encourager, someone who brings joy to people, someone whom God uses to raise hope in people even if circumstances are dire?* Barnabas was evidently this type of man. He had perhaps come to Jerusalem from Cyprus for Pentecost, and it appears he is one of those more than 5000 people whose life was being radically changed by Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit unleashed IN Barnabas and THROUGH him as he was a great blessing to many.

Did you notice Barnabas is referred to by Luke as a **"Levite"**? That means he was born into the Hebrew tribe of Levi. They were considered very special among the Jewish people. *When God brought the Hebrew slaves out of Egypt to mount Sinai and explained to them what it would mean for them to no longer be slaves but to be His chosen people, Moses spends two chapters explaining WHY the Levites were special to God, WHERE they would camp as these 1 million people moved from place to place, and WHAT their special jobs were.* Moses and his brother Aaron and sister Miriam were Levites. You'll remember God had instructed these 1 million people to arrange their tents by families and tribes around the Tabernacle, in a specific order. The Levites were to be the tribe closest to the Tabernacle and they alone had the privilege of dismantling, transporting and rebuilding the Tabernacle along with its sacred worship objects, every time the cloud of God Presence moved! You'll find that and much more in Numbers 2,3,4. In Numbers 3:45 God directed Moses to write: **"The Levites are Mine! I am the LORD."**

My guess is from the time Barnabas was a little boy he was over and over again told by his parents and grandparents that he was special to God, born into a very special line of people through whom God wanted to bless the world! *I wonder how your life and mind would change if we'd consider that the primary mission God has for you and me for the rest of our lives is that we would be a channel through whom God could BLESS our world and specifically every person our lives touch?!* Let's pause right here and consider that powerful possibility and the utopia Luke describes in Jerusalem. I urge you to listen to the audio dramatic Bible version of these verses and put yourself right into Jerusalem, and then ask God to help you see deep down in your own heart. If God is wanting to do this in your city, would God see you are ready for Him to use to be a great blessing to others?

**Today's Scripture is Acts 4:32-36.**