

WEDNESDAY 17 August 2022 “Simultaneously”

Good morning my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

"Simultaneous" is a wonderful word, isn't it? It means 'at the same time' and we human beings, especially active people, love to have many things happening **"simultaneously"**, don't we? *Did you know God loves 'simultaneous'? In fact, God is the master of "simultaneous"*. He is not only holding the whole universe together and all that takes place within the galaxies, according to Colossians 1, but God is paying very close attention to what is happening here on planet earth in the lives of 8 billion people, and He is creating another 300,000 new babies every day! Wow! **That's lots of 'simultaneous' activity, would you agree?**

Now why would I spend a whole paragraph today talking about 'simultaneous'? Because that was also happening in the months and years immediately following Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension back to heaven. We've spent the last few weeks traveling with Barnabas in Acts 11, 13 and 14.

First, Barnabas was sent by the apostles from Jerusalem up to Syrian Antioch to investigate reports that a great spiritual movement was taking place in this large multi-cultural city. Hundreds of people, both Jews and Gentiles, were believing in the story of Jesus and trusting Jesus to be their Savior. The problem was... *it was NOT an 'authorized' spiritual movement!* I mean, none of the apostles was in Antioch! They were all in Jerusalem! It was apparently a 'grass roots' spiritual movement fueled by two types of people.

First those passionate Jewish Jesus followers who had gone to Jerusalem for the great Pentecost festival 50 days after Jesus' resurrection and they had been eyewitness to the great miracle of the Holy Spirit empowering the friends of Jesus to speak in other languages, *including the languages spoken in Syrian Antioch!* Many had trusted in Jesus to be their Messiah and Savior! (Acts 2) They had been baptized, and after the Pentecost festival they returned home to Antioch, and they began telling their story of life transformation. They also began gathering together often to praise God and pray and share with each other what the Holy Spirit was doing in their new spiritual journey! *A dynamic church of Jesus followers was forming in Antioch!*

Within a few years another wave of Jesus followers started migrating from Jerusalem 450 miles north to Syrian Antioch. A great persecution had broken out in Jerusalem, led by a passionate, zealous, radical Pharisee named Saul of Tarsus. This man was a lunatic, some thought. Dragging people out of their homes, arresting them and dragging them to stand trial as traitors before the Sanhedrin, the same group of religious leaders who had condemned Jesus to death.

Near panic was sweeping through Jerusalem and Jewish Jesus followers by the hundreds were locking up their homes and businesses and fleeing to other towns, including all the way to Antioch. (Acts 8:1)

Those two groups joined forces in Antioch, and it became a passionate, powerful movement of God. Antioch people not caught up in this movement needed a name for these radical people and chose the name "**CHRISTIANS**" (Acts 11:26), not because they were violent or terrorizing Antioch, on the contrary, they were loving and generous and hospitable and honest *and they loved Jesus Christ!*

Barnabas was sent by the apostles in Jerusalem to investigate what was happening in Antioch. (Acts 11:22) He was so greatly encouraged by what he found that he decided to stay a while and join the Jesus movement in Antioch. Before long Barnabas knew he needed help, so he went to Tarsus to find Saul.

Yes, the same Saul who had been terrorizing the Jesus followers, but NO not the same Saul, for a few years before this man Saul had a life changing encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus! (Acts 9) *Jesus had convinced Saul He was who those apostles claimed Him to be, the Jewish Messiah and Savior of the world.* Saul believed Jesus and became his passionate follower. He spent three years in the Arabian desert (Galatians 1:15-17) and Damascus area and then an extended time in Tarsus (Acts 9:29) studying the Scriptures he knew so well, now from a very different perspective, *a Messianic perspective, and led by the Holy Spirit Saul came to understand the Gospel of Jesus even more clearly than any of all the other apostles.*

Saul joined Barnabas in Antioch and for a whole year they taught the people of this rapidly growing Jesus movement all that the Holy Spirit was teaching them! (Acts 11:26) Then the Spirit called them out from the group and commissioned them to take the story and message of Jesus WEST, into territory no other apostle had gone. (Acts 13:2) *Even Jesus had not gone west!* And so, we've lately been following Barnabas and Saul on their remarkable missionary journey to Cyprus and then into modern day Turkey, as recorded in Acts 13 & 14. Their journey lasted two years and just yesterday we witnessed their arrival back in Antioch.

Now the word "simultaneous". While we've been tracing the journey with Barnabas and Saul, now called Paul the Apostle, (Acts 13:9), *the author of the book of Acts Dr. Luke has told us very little about what has been happening with Peter and the other apostles back in Jerusalem.* It's not because that wasn't important... it's simply the fact that it would take many written volumes to trace the steps of all the apostles and the Jesus movement in Jerusalem, and the surrounding area, during those years we've been following Barnabas and Paul. But Luke gives us at least four very significant accounts of happenings during this time in and around Jerusalem.

First in Acts 8 the amazing story of the deacon Philip fleeing the Jerusalem persecution and going, of all places, *into Samaria to share the Gospel with Samaritans, people the Jews hated!* And you'll remember we joined Philip's trip, as did Peter and John, *and we saw all the evidence of the Holy Spirit working among Samaritans as He had with Jews in Jerusalem. (Acts 8:14-17)*

Then in Acts 10 the remarkable story of Peter led by the Holy Spirit to take the Gospel to Caesarea and a Roman Centurion named Cornelius who was a God worshiper but did not know Jesus. That remarkable, God ordained encounter between Jewish Peter and Gentile Cornelius and the anointing of the Holy Spirit upon all those Gentiles gathered in Cornelius' home to hear Peter's proclamation of the Gospel, *proved God was simultaneously inviting Jews and Samaritans and Gentiles to trust Jesus and be saved from their sins!*

Thirdly, in Acts 12, King Herod's arrest of Peter and the execution of the apostle James, the brother of John, was a shocking reminder that simultaneously to this great movement of God in drawing people to Jesus in multiple places, there *were multiple opposing forces, both religious and political, determined to stop the spread of this Jesus movement and if possible, extinguish it completely and everywhere!*

Finally, was the rise of a new name among the apostles. **James, the son of Mary and Joseph and therefore 1/2 brother of Jesus, had refused to believe Jesus to be the Jewish Messiah while He was alive, but evidently Jesus' resurrection convinced James and he joined the group of Jesus followers.** He was evidently among them on the hillside as Jesus ascended and was present (Acts 1:14) with his mother Mary and the disciples when the Holy Spirit came upon them all in Acts 2. It is natural that James was welcomed in this Jesus movement and evidently was anointed by the Holy Spirit with leadership gifts and after the execution of James, John's brother, this James, Jesus' brother became one of the key leaders in the Jesus Jerusalem movement.

Now friends let me show you one more very interesting 'simultaneous'. It seems as Paul and Barnabas settle now in Antioch for two years of teaching and Paul begins writing his first letter to the **Gentile Jesus followers** in the province of Galatia, and specifically the towns they had visited in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, *the Holy Spirit simultaneously moves in the heart of James* to write to the **Jewish Jesus followers** both in Jerusalem but also scattered around the Palestine region where they had fled the persecution more than 10 years before!

Two men called by Jesus to write, both guided carefully the Holy Spirit with each word they would write. One in Antioch, one in Jerusalem. One writing to Gentile Jesus followers, one writing to Jewish Jesus followers and both very involved daily in the Jesus movement where they lived at that time... Paul in Syrian Antioch and James in Jerusalem. Oh, how I love watching God work **SIMULTANEOUSLY** for His glory and the accomplishment of His purposes in our world.

So, here's my closing questions for you and me today...

* *How well informed are you of what God is doing 'simultaneously'* where you live and in other places around the world?

* *How is God working "simultaneously"* in the various spheres of your life... where you work; your friends; your extended family; your neighborhood; your church?

I urge us to pause and ask God to help us catch a glimpse of His majesty as seen in His **Simultaneous** Work for His glory! Watch the sunSET tonight and consider this: simultaneously it is sunRISE for people on the other side of the world! Oh, let's praise our great God and rejoice in what Jesus is doing all around the world today...**SIMULTANEOUSLY!!!**

Today's Scripture is Acts 14.